

Dharma Talk
given by
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Returning to Our True Home

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning dear friends.

Welcome to the summer opening of Plum Village. Today we are on the 16th of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

This is the Dharma talk for the very young people. We want to talk to you about pebble meditation. You know what a pebble is: a small piece of rock. This morning each young person should go and look for five pebbles. It may be a little bit difficult but you have to go around the campus in the Upper Hamlet or in the Lower Hamlet or in the New Hamlet and you look for five beautiful pebbles because we are going to practice pebble meditation in the next seven days. Those of you who feel young you can do that also.

After having found the five most beautiful pebbles, you have to go and wash them very carefully, with soap, and dry them, and you do that with love and care because the pebbles are going to help you to be more peaceful, more happy. If your mommy is there, or your big sister is there, have her make you a little bag in order to carry the five pebbles. A little bag like this. And every time you practice sitting meditation you have to bring the five pebbles along. Don't forget it. If you forget the pebbles, it is like a musician forgetting his or her guitar.

When you come to the meditation hall, you practice walking slowly in to the place where you will sit down. The moment when you enter the door of the meditation hall, you know that this is the meditation hall, a quiet place. A place of peace, a place of strength. And therefore you respect the silence. Very important. If you respect the silence of the meditation hall, then everyone will profit from the meditation hall. If you make a lot of noise in the meditation hall, that will not be kind to other people who do need the meditation for their practice.

When you enter the door of the meditation hall, bow to the Buddha. The Buddha may not be there on the altar, but he is somewhere in the garden. Even if you don't see a Buddha, bow to a flower because, believe it or not, the flower is a Buddha. Sometimes I bow to the moon, and I call the moon a Buddha. Moon-Buddha, flower-Buddha. Sometimes I bow to a tree-Buddha. And sometimes I bow to a child. I bow to a child with my respect, because I know that the child is also a Buddha. If the child practices to become very calm, very gentle, she is very close to being a Buddha. So, every time I bow to a child, I don't do it just for the sake of being polite. I do it as a practice, because I know that if a child is calm, and peaceful, and happy, he or she is very close to being a Buddha. And if she keeps practicing, she will become a fully enlightened Buddha. I do have great respect for all children. I do have great respect for adults too, because all adults have been children in the past.

After you bow to the Buddha, in the direction of the Buddha garden, you practice walking slowly, mindfully, to the cushion where you will sit. You make several steps. Breathe in, one step. Breathe out, one step. You walk like a Buddha. The Buddha walks very mindfully, very beautifully, and if you think that you are a student of the Buddha, you have to practice, you have to walk deeply. And when you arrive at your cushion, bow to the cushion, because the cushion is going to help you to sit peacefully. The cushion is a friend. You bow to the cushion, say "Thank you, cushion," and sit down. Remember: one step, one breath. Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step, and I say, "In, out. In, out" until I arrive and I sit down.

And when I have sat down, I want to check whether my sitting position is correct or not because a correct sitting meditation is something like this. You are straight, you sit upright. Try to do it now: sit upright, in an upright position like this. But not stiff. Not like a piece of wood, no. The Buddha is not that stiff. The Buddha is very relaxed. Upright position. You may like to sit in the lotus position. The lotus position is one foot over the other. There. That is lotus position. Beautiful. Many of you can do it. Learn how to do it. Later on I would like you to draw a picture of yourself, sitting in the lotus position, smiling.

After you are sure that you are sitting in the most beautiful position, then you take out your little bag of the five pebbles. It is very important to do it slowly, mindfully. You take each pebble one by one, and you put it on your lap, just in front of your left knee. One, two, three, four, five. And you put the little empty bag next to them. After everybody has put his or her five pebbles out, you will hear the sound of the bell. The sound of the bell is the voice of the Buddha calling you, supporting you. The Buddha says something like, "Dear one, I am there for you. I am there with you. I am there to support you." So you have to listen to the bell like that.

Every time during the day when you hear the bell, always practice like that. Listen to the bell like you listen to the most beloved person, the Buddha, because the Buddha is love, the Buddha is care, the Buddha is in your mother, is in your father, is in yourself. The Buddha is always calling you to go back to yourself, to be more gentle, to be more peaceful, to be more happy. So when you listen to the bell, the Buddha of the bell, the sound of the bell, never talk. Never think. Never do anything, because you are listening to the voice of a person you respect and you love a lot. Just stand there quietly and listen with all your heart. If there are three sounds, then you listen for the whole period of three sounds, and during that time you listen and you breathe deeply. But I would recommend that you don't do it automatically. You breathe in and you feel fine, you breathe out and you feel happy, that is very important. What is the use of breathing, of practicing, if you don't feel fine, if you don't feel happy?

After you hear the sound of the bell, you begin to practice pebble meditation. Here is the practice for the children, but I guess the adults can imitate. It's very beautiful practice. I love this practice. I breathe in, and I call the name of the person I love the most. If your mother is the person you love the most, when you breathe in, you breathe deeply and call "Mommy!" Call her name in such a way that she becomes totally present, even if she is not there with you, even if she is in the kitchen, or in another city, or another town, or even if she is no longer there alive. She is with you in that moment. Call her name, deeply, with all your heart, and breathe in, and she is there with you, right away, very real, very deep. And when you breathe out, you say, "Here I am."

So during that practice of breathing in and breathing out, you and your mother are fully present. This is a very deep practice. It is not only for children. I practice it every day. I enjoy it very much, and I have more than five people I love the most. I am free to choose -- this evening I will choose five people, and next morning I will choose another five people. That can bring you a lot of happiness. Suppose you hold the name of someone who is very real, very fresh, very loving, very kind, and if you call his name, or her name, deeply, that person will be with you right in the moment and you can see that your body and your mind are refreshed by the presence of that person. So before the sitting meditation, you have to jot down the name of five persons whose name you think you are going to call. The Buddha is calling.

[Bell]

I just practiced “Dear Buddha,” breathing in, “Here I am,” breathing out. Very wonderful.

So if your mother is one of the persons you love the most, then you might begin by calling her name “Mother!” And when you breathe out, you smile and you say, “Here I am.” It is a very deep practice. Because meditation is to be there, to be present, and this we learn always. No matter how long you have practiced Buddhist meditation, you have to learn it again and again. To meditate means to be there. To be there with one hundred percent of yourself. If you are there only eighty percent, that's good, but that's not perfect. I don't blame you for not being perfect. I just ask you to do better and better all the time. Maybe yesterday I was able to be there eighty percent, today I try to be eighty-one percent; because the more I am present, the happier I become, the more solid I become. This is only for my happiness, my stability; not for someone else's.

You call the name of your mother five times, breathing in, and you say five times, breathing out, “Here I am.” And after you finished five breathing in, breathing out, calling the name of your mother, and then you use your two fingers, you pick up one pebble, and you move it to your right. You understand? Not complicated. And then you sit upright again, and you begin to breathe in again, and call the name of the second person. Suppose you love David. David is very sweet to you. David is a person who tends to be wonderful, compassionate, helpful. So you breathe in and you call “David!” and you breathe out and you say, “Here I am.” Here is the length of my in-breath. I breathe like this: [Ten second pause]. And during that whole time, I just call his name, or her name. So you have enough time in order to make him or her fully present.

And when she is fully present, you just break out and smile, and you say, “Here I am.” It is very wonderful. I think even during the first hour of practice, the first time you practice, you find joy and happiness already. I believe it. So you call his name five times, and you say “Here I am.” five times, breathing in and out, and enjoy doing that. I prefer you not do it, rather than do it and not enjoy doing it and think that it is something you have to do like a mathematics exercise. No, I don't want you to do meditation like doing a mathematics exercise. This is much more pleasant. Very nourishing, very wonderful. And I want to do it right! Otherwise later on you say “Thầy did not teach me right.” I want to give you the right teaching, the teaching that can help you to be happy and peaceful.

And after you finish “David” five times, you move the second pebble to your right, until you finish all five pebbles. And if you still have time, if the bell doesn't ring yet, and then you continue the practice and you move the pebble from the right back to the left. And during the time of doing so, if the bell sounds, and there are still two or three pebbles to be practiced, it's OK, because we practice all our life. For children I don't want the practice to take too long a time. Just right for the young people. If they sit too long, they will get tired easily. So I don't want them to sit too long. I don't want adults to sit too long, too, if they suffer during sitting. It is better not to sit than to suffer while sitting. Please.

And when you hear the bell, just practice breathing in and out again. “Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I smile.” You have succeeded in your pebble meditation today and you are going to put it down in your notebook, that today I have practiced pebble meditation well, I succeeded. I had some joy, some compassion, and some happiness during the practice of pebble meditation. And after three sounds of the bell, practicing breathing in and breathing out, you hear a very small sound of the bell. This sound:

[Bell]

That sound is for you to bow, and to undo your legs and to massage them with gentleness. You practice massage, you try to be nice, to be kind to your legs. You help the blood to circulate well in your leg. You have the time to do so. If you are the leader of the pebble meditation, please remember allow enough time for the other children to massage their feet. That is the practice of compassion. Remember, because during pebble meditation I want the leader to be a young person. So you select, you elect your own leader every time, to lead the pebble meditation. And you know if you are a leader of pebble meditation, you got to have a watch. I don't have any watch today.

So you have enough time to massage your feet, and after you have massaged your feet, you still have time, to do what? To put the five pebbles back into the bag, the small bag, and put it into your pocket. Later on you may practice walking meditation, slow walking meditation, but walking meditation is the subject of another Dharma talk. Today is just pebble meditation. So, dear young people, you know what you have to do today. Go and look for five beautiful pebbles. Wash them carefully and try to make a little bag for it. If you don't have a bag today, you can wait for tomorrow, after tomorrow. You may put it in a small envelope, a paper envelope. But I want you to have a very beautiful little bag in order to contain your five pebbles. So have a very pleasant day, happy day. When you hear the small bell, you stand up and bow and then when you hear another bell you turn around and bow to the Sangha, and you practice going out slowly, mindfully, beautifully, in the style of walking meditation. Have a good day.

[Bell]

My dear friends: meditation is the act of stopping and looking. We have to learn the art of stopping and the art of looking. And the practice may be pleasant, must be pleasant. It is possible to make the practice pleasant, nourishing. It is not hard labor. People speak of meditation in terms of *samatha* and *vipassana*. *Samatha* means stopping and *vipassana* means looking, looking deeply. If you stop, you stop well. And if you look, you look well. Stopping is an art. Stopping in order to give your body and your mind a chance to heal. Because our mind has the capacity of healing itself. Our body also, if we allow it, will be able to heal itself. But because we don't know how to stop, how to give our body a chance, our body cannot heal itself. Our mind also is a kind of body, a spiritual body. Our mind does have the capacity of healing itself. But if it does not heal itself, if it has not healed itself because we have not given it a chance — that is why you have to learn the deep art of stopping, *samatha*. *Samatha* is stopping. To stop in order for calm, concentration, tranquility, to become possible.

Imagine a river reflecting the full moon. The river must be calm in order to reflect the full moon. If the river or the ocean is full of waves, if it is too turbulent, then it can never reflect the beautiful image of the moon. Our body, if it is not calm, if it is not restful, then it will not be able to restore itself, to heal itself. You know that when an animal gets wounded because of a hunter, or because of some other accident, that animal in the jungle will find a calm place to lie down. That is the practice of all animals in the forest. And the animal will lie down there very quietly, not eating anything, until the wound is healed; because the animal knows that if it continues to look for something to eat, then its body will have no chance to rest and restore itself. So looking at the animal, we see already the wisdom of stopping and resting and calming. The animals can do it, why can't we do it ourselves.

Do we need to eat all the time, every day? I just finished a fourteen days fast, and I look fine. I even look better. You may think that I am a little bit thin, but I feel fine. By fasting, by not doing anything, by abandoning all projects, all desires, you allow your body to stop, to rest, to renew itself. And that is why during the time you are with us in Plum Village, try your best to learn the art of stopping, of resting. Now a season of labor comes. People are very eager to go to the beach and to other holiday resorts, and they think that they are going to rest, but I am not sure that they are going to rest. They may get very tired after the period of so-called resting. Here in Plum Village, you have a Sangha. You have a community of many hundred people, and all of them are trying to really rest, really stop, and you try to do like them. You allow yourself a chance. If you can allow your body to rest, then you can also allow your mind, your consciousness, to rest also. All of us need it.

The animal knows that there is a reserve in itself. It can survive many, many days without eating, and that is why the animal is not eager to go and look for something to eat. In fact, fasting is a very wonderful way of healing yourself. The most difficult disease you have may just be healed by fasting. You don't even need a doctor. You are the doctor. You know your needs. You know how to lie down. You know how to lie down? Are you sure? You know how to sit quietly? Are you sure? Do you have the opportunity to lie down and really rest? Do you have the opportunity to really sit down, properly? Because in you there is a tendency to struggle, to do this, to do that, because you have been taught since time immemorial that you have to struggle for your happiness. And during many generations you have been struggling, you have been running. You have never been able to stop. Our great-grandfather did like that, our grandfather did like that, our father did like that, and now we are doing exactly the same thing. Always running, because we believe that happiness is something in the future, and you have to go there in order to grasp it.

So it is not that easy to stop and to rest. You have to learn, and you have to get the support of brothers and sisters who are doing the same. They don't urge you to do. They help you by doing that by themselves. When everyone is practicing walking (walking means stopping, walking meditation), sitting, enjoying a silent meal, because all these practices are just for the sake of stopping. Are you able to enjoy a meal without running, running inside? During the time of a meal, you may run into ten directions. You are not really there for your meal, and for your Sangha. And that is why you have to receive instructions properly, and you have to do it properly in order for our rest, our stopping, to be possible. You know how important it is to rest, to stop. That the animal is healed is not a miracle, because the animal knows the way how to heal itself.

Just yesterday, someone asked Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, what he'd like the most, what he needs the most. He said, "What I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have never had the chance to sit down." Poor man. Do you want to be the president of the republic? He said that he has not had a chance to sit down for himself, and to sit down with his children. What kind of life is that? When I heard the report, I asked myself whether, if he were given time to sit down, would he be able to sit down? I don't know whether he has learned the art of sitting or not, but if you don't know how to sit, then even if you are offered the time to sit, to do nothing, you will not be able to do so. You will stand up right away, and you continue to run. You are more fortunate than Nelson Mandela. You can afford to come to a retreat just to sit down, just to lie down and do nothing. But again, you have a chance. That does not mean that you can do it. Therefore, we have to learn from each other, and the Buddha has offered us so many ways in order for us to heal our self, including stopping. Breathing is stopping. Walking is stopping. Sitting is stopping. Eating is stopping. Meditation is to stop.

We have to believe in our capacity of healing, the capacity of our body to heal itself. You know when you cut your finger, you don't worry, because you know that it will heal by itself, provided that you don't interfere too much. You just wash it and leave it like that. Maybe in a few hours or one night it will be able to do so. So your body has the power of healing itself. You know it. For the more serious illness, it can also heal itself, provided that you give it a chance, you allow it to do so. So learn the technique of total relaxation, learn the technique of lying down there not doing anything, especially in your head, because many of us, while laying down or sitting, still run in our heads, still run in our minds. Because that is a habit of one thousand, three thousand years already. We have inherited it from our ancestors and the society urges us to continue and to double that kind of speed.

The Buddha said that what you are looking for may be already there, in the here and the now. But you are running, and if you are running, how can you recognize what you are looking for. It is right there in the here and the now. Peace is available in the here and the now, believe it or not. Calm is also available in the here and the now. The Buddha is not in India. The Buddha is there in the here and the now. You can touch him at any time you want. The kingdom of God is also there in the here and the now. The present moment is the only moment where you can touch these wonderful things that you are looking for. But you always run, you abandon the present moment because you believe that what you are looking for is somewhere there in the future. So stopping means trying to dwell in the present moment, trying to go back to the present moment, because the present moment contains everything you are looking for, including your immediate need, resting. How can you rest in the future? How can you rest in the past? The present moment is the only moment when you can rest. So make good use of it.

Now let us ask the question whether you can dwell peacefully and restfully in five minutes, because our body needs it badly, our soul needs it very badly, and you know it. So please learn. All of us have learned about deep relaxation. In the lying position, you allow your muscles to be relaxed. You practice love directed to your body. You think you love yourself, but that's not evident. To love oneself means also to take good care of your body. That is one of the basic things. But do you allow your body to rest? Are you always assigning it to do something, always? You have never allowed your body to really rest, even during the time of sleeping, your body is assigned to do something, consciously or unconsciously. And even during the time of sleep, your body does not rest. In the lying position, allow yourself to be in the here and the now. All your projects, all your worries, must be postponed. Why do you have to worry when your body needs a rest? If you continue to worry, how could your body rest? So you have to support your body by not worrying.

When you practice breathing in or breathing out, you have to put one hundred percent of your mind into the in-breath and out-breath, and if you can do so, you stop the worry. You stop your projects. You invest in the in-breath and out-breath. I breathe in, I just enjoy breathing in. Breathing in for this moment is the most important thing I want to do, and I enjoy breathing in. Breathing in, I feel wonderful; breathing out, I smile. One in-breath, one out-breath, can help you do that, and help your body to be off pressure, because your body has always been under pressure, not only from society, from what you call deadlines, but from your mind. You don't have a habit of granting your body a real rest because you are used to worrying too much, to making too many projects. You think that your happiness, your safety, depends on these projects; and if you don't worry, who will worry for you? But you have been worried for many thousand years. So enjoy breathing in, because breathing in is a wonderful thing to do.

The Buddha left behind a very wonderful text called the *Anapanasati Sutra*, the Sutra on Mindful Breathing, and he presented to us a number of exercises that help us to practice deep relaxing and deep looking. There is one exercise you might like to practice: “Breathing in, I calm my body.” “I calm my body,” that means I let my body have a chance to do nothing, to calm down. “Breathing out, I smile to my body.” Have you been kind to your body? Have you smiled to your body?

That exercise, “Breathing in, I calm my body; breathing out, I smile to my body,” might be practiced when you sit, or when you lie down. Invest one hundred percent of yourself into the practice, because if you do well, then all thinking, all projects, all worries will be stopped. You are at one with your in-breath, your out-breath, and you allow your body to rest. So, in a sitting meditation, in a sitting position, you allow your body to rest. On your cushions, you don't fight, even for enlightenment. You don't fight to become a Buddha. If you allow yourself to be, that's already wonderful. If you can afford to have half an hour of sitting, you know that you are luckier than Nelson Mandela. So please use your half hour of sitting wisely. Make a plan: tonight I will have a chance to sit for half an hour, so I know what I will do during that time. I will ask a Dharma brother, a Dharma sister, or a Dharma teacher, how I can succeed during that half an hour of sitting meditation. I have to succeed. You know I very much wish that the children succeed in their pebble meditation. We also have to succeed in our sitting meditation. Please don't do it for the sake of the form. We don't have that kind of luxury. Our body needs us. Our mind needs us. Therefore we have to love them, to take care of them, to allow them a chance to rest, to restore themselves.

Maybe during the first or second exercise of breathing, you feel already wonderful, because just to sit there and to breathe is already wonderful. Many people cannot afford to do that. Even if they want to do that, nobody tells them how to do it. Now we are in a Sangha. Everyone in the Sangha is able to help us: how to breathe in and breathe out, and to be relaxed, to be calm. And we have to cherish the chance of practice. And during the breathing in and out, you might feel wonderful. You might feel rested. And then the Buddha will advise you to proceed to the next exercise: “Breathing in, I feel joyful. I feel wonderful. Breathing out, I smile to my joy.” This is nourishing, very nourishing. Believe it or not, you are there, alive. That is a miracle. That is the greatest of all miracles, and you have to celebrate it.

We have destroyed so many moments of our lives. We have destroyed so many days, so many months, so many years of our lives. We spent them in suffering, in anguish, in anger, and that is a waste. We have to cherish all moments that are left for us to live. We have to live peacefully, happily, and that is our greatest gift for the world, for the next generation. Our children need our happiness. They don't need our money. They need our happiness, because if we know how to live happily with each other, the children will learn it from us, and that is the greatest heritage we can hand down to our children. Many young people have told me that the greatest gift that parents can give to their children is their own happiness. You have to listen to them. They need it badly.

So during the time you practice breathing in, breathing out, you invest one hundred percent of your energy, of yourself, into the in-breath and the out-breath. That is for your body. That is for your mind. In the sitting position or in the lying down position, when you feel a little bit of joy, of confidence in your practice, then you practice, “Breathing in, I feel joyful. Breathing out, I smile to my happiness, to my joy.” Continue like that, on the cushion. Please do not say that this is something difficult to do. It's simple. You can do it. And you have Dharma brothers and sisters around you to support you. If you want to support your brother or your

sister, practice well. Practice so that stability and peace become something real, in the present moment.

The Buddha said that life is available only in the present moment, and if you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. And that is why: go back to the present moment where you can be alive, where you can live deeply each moment of your life, and where you can allow your body and your soul to live. You do it for yourself, but you do it for all of us. We need you to be peaceful. We need you to be stable. We need you to have joy. That is for the sake of the world. Your practice is not an individual matter. Your practice will benefit the whole world. When you are able to breathe in and breathe out with joy and peace, the whole world profits. Not only will the people who are close to you profit, the whole world will profit.

[Bell]

I enjoy so much breathing in and breathing out. It's so easy. It's so pleasant. And I wish all of you could do the same. The bell reminds us. Every time you hear the bell, please practice going back to the present moment, breathing in, breathing out. Take good care of yourself. Feel alive. Feel that life is a wonder. Don't waste your life. Don't ruin your life, because your life is our life, also. There is a very simple gatha, a simple verse for you to practice. You might like to learn it today. When you breathe in, you say, "I have arrived," and when you breathe out, you say, "I am home." According to this practice, your true home is in the here and the now, and our practice is the practice of arriving every second into our true home, which is the present moment, the only moment when life is available. We have been running all our lives to the past, to the future, to our projects. Now it is time to go home. And if you go home and look and touch deeply, you'll be surprised to see that what you are looking for is already there. Peace is available. Touch it, live it, enjoy. And when you do it, peace will reveal itself more and more clearly.

"I have arrived. I am home." It means that I don't have to run anymore. When you hear the bell, you say "Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is here and now. The here and the now is universal. "Here" is not Plum Village; "here" is everywhere you are, and "now" is something that goes along with the here, because the here and the now cannot be divided. They are just one thing, and that is your true home. If you think that the Kingdom of God is your true home, then the Kingdom of God is in the here and the now. You don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, you have to be very alive in order to do so. To be fully alive, to go back to the present moment, and to be there with one hundred percent of yourself, means to be alive. "I have arrived, I am home." On your cushion, practice arriving. You arrive in every second, every minute, to be there, alive.

During walking meditation, you also practice arriving. If you practice slow walking in the hall, you take one step, you take one in-breath and you say "I have arrived." How wonderful! It's easy, simple, it's very pleasant to practice. Your left foot touches the floor, the wooden floor. It's wonderful. Do you know that the wood is made of cloud and sunshine? The wood is made of cloud and sunshine and wind and earth, and for your feet to touch the wood, it's a very wonderful thing. If you are really there, you feel it, but if you are elsewhere, you don't feel it. Wood is nothing, your foot is nothing, you are nothing, because you are not there, in the here and the now. You breathe in and you say, "I have arrived." You cut through all thinking, all projects, all worries, you go back and establish yourself firmly in the present moment.

One step only, one breath only, and already you can realize a miracle, the miracle of being fully alive. Don't tell me that you cannot do that. You know that you can do that. Just breathe in, and make it one step, and become fully alive by bringing yourself entirely back to the present moment. And when you breathe out, you are already a wonder, because to be alive and to be walking on the earth is a miracle. Remember, you have seen a dead body. You cannot make that dead body rise and practice walking meditation anymore. But you are not a dead body. You are alive, and your feet are strong enough to enjoy walking meditation.

Plum Village is made for you to practice walking. Many thousand people have been walking around here, mindfully, and enjoying every second. The site has become a holy site, because mindfulness has been printed again and again on this soil. This soil during World War II was a place where tragedy took place, but because of our practice, we have transformed the atmosphere, we have transformed the land's soil. It is now a very peaceful, very holy place. Thanks to you all who have come to Plum Village and practiced with us. You practice walking meditation all year round, and we print our peace, our joy, on this soil, on this very soil. And when you practice walking around here you feel energy of practice.

When you say "I have arrived," breathing in, and when you say, "I am home," breathing out, you feel that you don't need to do anything else. Why do you have to pursue that project? Why do you think that if you don't realize the project, happiness is not possible? So you are able to realize stopping. Happiness is simple: I can have it right here and right now, and conditions for my happiness seem to be more than enough. I am still alive. My feet are still strong, my eyes are still in good condition, I can see the blue sky. I can see all kinds of forms and colors. My ears are also still in good condition. I can listen to all kinds of sounds, including the sounds of the birds. And my heart is functioning normally. You see, there are so many conditions for your happiness that are available, but because we are looking for another condition, that is why we deny all these conditions that are already existing. That is a loss. That is a pity.

Awakening -- Buddhism is the teaching of awakening. You have to wake up in order to realize that everything you are looking for is already there, may already be there. You have to recognize it. And walking meditation is also to stop. Even if you are still walking, you have already stopped. And if you make three hundred steps, make sure that each step brings you back peace, stability, and joy. Don't just walk like that, letting your mind wander around, going into the ten directions. Bring your mind back and tie it to your feet. Enjoy every step you make. Do it for all of us. If you can smile a smile of happiness, that will be very nourishing for your body, for your mind, for your Sangha, for the whole world. We need your smile badly.

"I have arrived, I am home." You practice like that for a few minutes. One breath, one step, in the meditation hall. And after some time you switch into the second exercise: "In the here and in the now," "In the here and in the now." It is exactly the same kind of practice. You have brought back yourself to the present moment. Maybe you have brought eighty percent of yourself back to the present moment. There is still twenty percent more to do. So when you say, "In the here and in the now," you may be able to be completely mindful and present. So each in-breath is to bring you back to the here; each out-breath is supposed to bring you back to the now, in the here and the now, because the here and the now is wonderful. Don't just say the word. It is silly just to say the word. The word is a means to help with your concentration, to show you what you are really doing, making peaceful, mindful, happy thoughts.

"I have arrived, I am home, in the here and in the now." And a few minutes of practice will bring you more stability and freedom. Freedom from what? This is not political freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from suffering. You get it slowly, just by dwelling in the present moment, and touching the wonders of life. You will get rid of the kind of worries that are not essential at all, because peace and joy are possible. Why do you have to worry too much? "I am solid," because you have become solid. This is not autosuggestion, because after few minutes of practicing arriving in the here and the now, you feel that you are more solid, and you feel that you are more free. Free from what? Free from these worries, free from these anxieties, from these projects.

Please note that solidity and freedom are the two characteristics, the two basic characteristics, of *nirvana*. Nirvana is a state of being where solidity and freedom exist, and you can touch nirvana right in the first hour of practice. And if you continue the touching you'll be deeper and deeper all the time, until you can touch nirvana one hundred percent. The Buddha said that in the here and the now, you can touch nirvana with your own body. He did not say with your mind. Touching nirvana with your own body, that is the way the Buddha put it. It is possible. It is not an idea. It is not a notion. It is something you already can do. And happiness will be something possible if stability and freedom are there. To practice means to cultivate solidity and freedom, which are essential to our well-being, essential to our happiness.

"I have arrived, I am home," and then, "In the here, in the now." Then, "I am solid, I am free." And finally, "In the ultimate I dwell." Or, if you want, "In the Buddha-land I dwell," or "In the Kingdom of God I dwell," because nirvana, the Buddha-land, the Kingdom of God, is available in the here and the now, and you have begun to touch it. The depth of your touching depends on your concentration, on your mindfulness, on your stability. André Gide said that God is available to you twenty-four hours a day. André Gide is a French author, and he's right. Nirvana also, the Buddha, the Buddha-land also, is available to you twenty-four hours a day if you care, if you really care. If you go back to the present moment and make yourself available, and then the other thing is also available. The other thing is the full moon, the cherry blossoms, the blue sky, the smile of your beloved one, life, nirvana.

Please don't be satisfied with words and notions. You have to get the real thing. The real thing is stability, solidity, and freedom. "I am solid, I am free. In the Buddha-land I dwell." And walking like that can make you very happy. You are there, but you are already in the real thing, in the ultimate. The ultimate means the world of no birth, no death. Nirvana is the world of no birth and no death. If you dwell in the present moment and if you practice looking deeply, one time, one day, you will touch very deeply the ground of your being, the ground of your being where birth and death vanish. It's like a wave. If the wave practices touching itself deeply, it will touch the water inside itself. A wave might be born or might be dying, but the water is not subjected to birth and death. Your true nature is the nature of no birth and no death, the nature of nirvana. So if you walk deeply, you begin to touch your own nature. That is why we say "In the ultimate I dwell." It's very deep.

And if you practice walking meditation outside, you can do it more quickly. Instead of one step, one breath, you make two steps, or even three steps, one breath. Instead of simply doing "I have arrived, I am home," you do like this: "I have arrived, arrived, I am home, home." So breathing in, I make two steps, two beautiful steps, and when I breathe out, I make two beautiful steps, and I enjoy it just the same. When you go back to your city and practice walking meditation in Central Park, you wouldn't like to go too slowly, like in the meditation hall. People will look at you and wonder what you are doing, you don't look very normal. You want to be normal, you want to be natural. So you can be very mindful, very concentrated,

and yet you can look absolutely natural. You can make three steps while breathing in: "I have arrived, arrived, arrived." You don't have to close your eyes. In fact you have to open your eyes in order to enjoy the trees, the birds, the blue sky, and the people around you. And yet you are concentrated, because you are following your in-breath and out-breath.

"I have arrived, arrived, arrived. I am home, I am home, I am home." You'll be surprised to see that you have no desires left. That's wonderful. True happiness is only available if you have no desire. No desire is the object of my deepest desire. Why should I desire anything else? If I found it is wonderful in the here and the now and I have everything, why should I desire something else? Not a difficult thing. So, please practice and discover that the miracles, the jewels, the most precious things you are looking for are already available: the fact that you are alive, and many wonders of life within you and around you. So during the time you practice walking with the Sangha outside, you can make three steps or two steps, but I would advise you to use the same kind of speed that the Sangha is using, so that you become part of the harmony, of the symphony. And to walk like that is just to enjoy life. To be walking mindfully and enjoy every step you make is to celebrate life. You don't have an orchestra with you. You don't have drums or trumpets and other things in order to celebrate. You just touch the earth and walk with the other brothers and sisters, and you are celebrating the fact that you are alive, and you do it very deeply because you are dwelling in the here and the now. And during the time of walking, your body rests. Your mind rests, also. Not only during the time of sitting or lying down.

About eating: eating is also resting. Eating is a very deep practice. You sit there with the community and you offer one hundred percent of yourself, not less. Don't sit somewhere else. Please sit with us one hundred percent. And you know in order to do that, in order to offer us your true presence, you have to practice mindful breathing. Mindful breathing will bring you back to the here and the now. We need you to be with us. And during the whole time of the meal, we touch only two things, our mind touches only two things: the food, which is the gift of the sky and the earth, and also the community of practice that is there. My mind does not think or embrace anything else, because to be alive, to be sitting there and enjoying a meal with brothers and sisters in the practice, is a wonderful thing.

This is something practiced by the Buddha and his monks and nuns during that time. It is called "one sitting lunch." You sit down very beautifully and you enjoy the meal until the end; meanwhile, you don't think. And you have to enjoy every moment of the meal. Sit upright, look at the food, smile to it. Each morsel of food is an ambassador from the cosmos. It contains sunshine, clouds, the sky, the earth, the farmer, everything. Each morsel of the food is a piece of bread offered to you by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper. You have to eat it mindfully, in mindfulness. Look into the piece of bread, look into the piece of carrot you are eating, one hundred percent of yourself, and touch that, deeply. When you pick up one piece of carrot, don't put it into your mouth yet. Look at it and smile to it. And if you are mindful, you will see deeply into the piece of carrot. Sunshine is inside. A cloud is inside. The great earth is inside. A lot of love, a lot of hard work is inside. And when you have seen clearly the real piece of carrot, you put it into your mouth, and you chew it mindfully. And please, be sure to chew only carrots, and not your projects, not your worries.

This is deep practice: enjoy chewing your carrot. It is wonderful. The piece of carrot is a miracle. You, also, are a miracle. And chew carefully. In Plum Village, we chew from thirty times to fifty times, because we love it. We don't have to do it, but because the time being together is wonderful. So you just spend time with your food, and every minute of your lunch should be happy. And from time to time, you would pause and look and smile at a sister or a

brother in the Dharma. Not many people, including Nelson Mandela, have the time, have the chance, have the opportunity to sit down and enjoy a meal like that. We are very fortunate.

We are very glad that you have come and shared the summer opening with us. Today we have a formal meal, like in the tradition. It's a little bit longer than in other days, but we have to keep the tradition alive, so each week, we have just one formal meal, and during the time of the meal, we offer a little bit of food, symbolically, to living beings before we eat. Now it is time for walking meditation, to celebrate the fact that we are all still alive, then after that we will take a break before participating in the weekly formal meal.

Now you have learned how to walk. Please, from this time on, every time you need to walk, only use the style of walking meditation. We don't use any other kind of walking style here, just walking like you are, the happiest person ever.

Practices for the Twenty-first Century

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 21, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July, 1996. We are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we speak English.

In my mind, the twenty-first century is like a hill, a beautiful hill with so many beautiful trees and paths and flowers and children. There will be only four more years before we start climbing the hill of the twenty-first century. You know a century is a period of one hundred years. I count on climbing it with you all. We should plan our climbing in such a way that joy, happiness is possible. We are now in the year 1996. If you have ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and then two thousand, only four kilometers. And we only have four years left to prepare ourselves for the next century.

The twenty-first century is somehow like a beautiful garden. We expect to have flowers, fruit, beautiful trees, beautiful streams of rivers -- a beautiful garden where every living being has a chance to live, has a right to be. Not only the human person, but also the squirrel, also the snail, also the snake, will have their place in that garden of the twenty-first century. We shall have the coconut trees there, we shall have the kiwi tree, mango and so on. We will have all kind of animals. In order to have such a beautiful garden, a beautiful hill to climb and to be in, we have to prepare ourselves. If you don't feel ready yet, then you have to come together to discuss the strategy, how to begin the twenty-first century with confidence.

You know, the organic gardeners are very wise. They know to preserve the garbage, and they can transform the garbage back into compost. With that kind of compost, they can grow beautiful flowers, beautiful vegetables and trees. In the kitchen of the Buddha, we learn that the garbage may be useful. If you do not know how to take care of the garbage, then there will be a mess. You cannot live. But if you know how to take care of the garbage, then the garbage will become something very useful for us, to make our garden more beautiful, to make our hill more beautiful.

During the Twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, too much. The suffering of the war in Vietnam, is a lot of garbage. The garbage is still there, not only in Vietnam, but in America. The garbage produced by the Vietnam War is still delivered all over America as a nation. The suffering is still there, not only in the veterans, in their families, but in the deep consciousness of all Americans. And not only Vietnamese and Americans suffer because of that garbage produced by the Vietnam War, but all of us in Europe, in Australia, in Africa. All of us suffered because of the garbage produced during so many, many years.

We have produced a lot of garbage everywhere. In the former Yugoslavia the garbage is still intact. No one has taken care to transform the garbage. In the Middle East, the Gulf War also produced a lot of garbage. It produced a lot of garbage in the world and it also produced a lot of garbage in our heart, in our consciousness. To take good care of the garbage is to collect them and to put them together in a heap. Maybe you have to dig a hole, you dump the garbage in, you produce some heat, you water the garbage. The organic gardeners, especially, they know how to take care of the garbage and transform it into compost. So our suffering, the suffering we have caused, is all garbage. We should know how to good care of it order to transform them.

Who are the specialists? They are developed countries who are thinking of transporting garbage and dumping it on the Third World countries. That's not very responsible. We have only four years, before we start climbing the twenty-first century. We have to learn how to take care of our garbage now, so that at beginning of the new century we have enough compost to nourish our flower.

Today I want to talk to the children about the home they will live in in the twenty-first century. I have some vision about what we call the home of the twenty-first century. How can we organize our home in the twenty-first century so that we may live better? Architects have been working on it a lot, the habitat of the twenty-first century. We want to bring our contribution. I think the home of the twenty-first century should have a room called the breathing room, a room where we can seek asylum from aggression, from noise, from rough speech, from anger, from afflictions. Every home has to be equipped with such a room. It is equivalent to our meditation hall here at Plum Village. It is a sacred place. It does not need to be big, but it should be a real place for peace. It may be three meters by three meters, or even smaller, but it should be a real place of peace.

Every time you want to enter this room you have to bow, because this is the territory of the Buddha, the territory of peace, of compassion. Facing peace and compassion we have to be very respectful. So before entering this room you should breathe in and out and you bow to the knob of the door, because the moment you touch the knob of the door you touch the Buddha, you touch God, you touch Jesus, you touch the kingdom of heaven. Our modern home should house the kingdom of heaven inside, should house the Pure Land inside. Please children, think, meditate on this and tell us your ideas, our home of the twenty-first century.

Every time mommy is angry, every time papa is shouting at mommy, at your brother or your sister, you feel hell in your house. You don't want to dwell in hell. You want to escape. Where can you go? The answer is the pure land, the kingdom of peace that is in your home. Go to that room, bow deeply to the door, breathe in and out, softly touch the knob of the door, turn it slowly, open it and step into it with mindfulness. There is only one way of stepping into the kingdom of peace and that is walking meditation, and you have learned that in Plum Village. Breathing in, I calm myself and I make a step, breathing out I smile and then I can step into the kingdom of peace. My daddy has no right to pursue me into that territory of peace and shout after me. Because once you are in that territory of peace, you have something like diplomatic immunity. No one can pursue you into the territory of the country of peace, of the Buddha.

I think the children will profit a lot from this room. How should we call this room? "Breathing room" is okay, but I guess that there are many much more beautiful names that you can use to name this room that is in our house. Every civilized family should have such a room, because in each house there are rooms for everything: a place for eating, a place for watching television, a place for guest, a place to do laundry. We have all kind of rooms, except the kind of room we need the most, a room where we can restore our peace, we can restore our dignity. A room where we can touch the Buddha, we can touch our ancestors, we can touch our peace and our happiness.

We should tell our architects, we should tell our artists, to design that room in such a way that when we enter into that room we feel peace at once. A little bit like every time we step into the meditation hall we feel something sacred. You are not supposed to talk loudly in the meditation hall, you are not suppose to run in the meditation hall, because this is a place where people can go back to themselves, and touch the depth of themselves. That is why I always ask the children after the Dharma talk to go out of the meditation hall in the style of walking meditation.

So we should house the kingdom of peace in our modern home. What about furniture in that room? You have to think about this and tell us. What do you think is needed? I think it would need a few cushions. I think it would need a little table, so that you can place on it a beautiful flower vase; because a flower or a beautiful branch can very much represent the beauty of the cosmos. You might like to spend one hour just to arrange a flower vase that has only one flower, a few leaves. During the time you arrange the flower vase, you practice peace, and you touch peace deeply within your self. So in this beautiful room you have a few cushions, you have a little table where you can put a beautiful flower. When you go in, you may bow to

the flower. The flower is fresh, and you want to be fresh as the flower. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh." You know all of us were originally flowers. Look at the children. They look exactly like flowers, very fresh, very refreshing, and that is why I love to be surrounded by children. They make you feel young and fresh.

[Bell]

The children might be angry at times, the children might be jealous at times, but they can always return to being a flower very easily. That is a miracle. But we adults, it's not that easy. We cannot return, go back to our state of being fresh very quickly. All adults have been children. Our original happiness, not original sin, is being a child. But because we have not been able to take good care of our flower, our flower is not very fresh when we grow up. So to practice meditation is to protect our flower, not to let ourselves wither because of what is happening in our daily life. Look at the children, their eyes are really flowers, their mouths are flowers, their little hands are two beautiful flowers, their little teeth are flowers, very beautiful, very fresh. Every time you go into the meditation hall, you look at the flower, you bow to it, and you recover your flower. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower": that is not wishful thinking, because you were originally a flower. It is possible for you to return to the state of a flower.

Maybe because you have cried a lot, that is why your eyes are not as limpid and as fresh as the eyes of children. But if you practice for few months, touching the refreshing elements within you and around you, you will recover the flower of your eyes. When we look at you through your eyes, we can touch the flower in you. Your smile is also a flower. If you have lost your smile, don't be discouraged. The dandelion is still keeping it for you. If you know how to look at the dandelion and you breathe and you smile the flower will hand it back to you, your flower. It's not difficult. The full moon, the blue sky, everything in the cosmos is still keeping your smile for you. They are very kind. You need only to touch them and you ask for your smile back. We need you to smile.

What else do we need as furniture in the breathing room, meditation room? I think we need something to burn, incense. I prefer a very light kind of incense, not too strong. You don't have to burn a lot of incense. There are people who go to the temple and burn a whole bunch of incense, it can be very suffocating. Just one stick of incense, the kind of incense made of natural ingredients, sandalwood, something like that. We don't need anything else. Maybe we need a bell, even a mini bell. Every summer I used to teach the children how to invite the bell. I think each family should have a bell, even a small one. Everyone in the house should be able to practice inviting the bell to sound, because the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us to our true home, to smile and to touch the peace and the flower in us. Please, all Dharma teachers and all the brothers and sisters, teach your children how to invite the bell.

You'll get much better just after breathing in and breathing out with the sound of the bell. When you invite the bell to sound you listen to it like you would listen to the person you love the most. And you practice breathing deeply, calming yourself and smiling. I'm certain that after three in-breaths and out-breaths like that you'll feel much better. Every time you get angry, you know, according to the practice you should not say anything. You should not do anything, everything you say, everything you do when you are angry may cause damage. The best way is to think of the room of peace and you start turning toward the direction of the room of peace and you practice walking meditation slowly to that room. Your mother looks at you and she knows what you are doing. You are practicing to take good care of your anger. She admires you for doing so. You are still young, but you know how to handle your anger.

In school they might teach you everything except how to take care of your anger. When you go to a retreat you have to learn these kinds of things. You make it into a habit every time you get angry, even with yourself. Then you have to turn to the direction of the peace room, the breathing room, and you go slowly in that direction in the style of walking meditation:

"Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile to myself." That is very kind of you to smile to yourself, because you are suffering. When you suffer you need love, and you are the one who can offer love to yourself first. Don't wait for another person. When you arrive at the door of the breathing room, you bow, because, that is the kingdom of peace. You go into your own heart. It is a room, but it is also a domain of your heart. Turn it slowly, open it, go into it with walking meditation. When you see your cushion, you bow to it and you sit down.

After you sit down, you may like to light a stick of incense, but if you are not in the mood to light incense, then you may bow to the little bell, pick up the little bell and hold it on your hand like this. You look at it. This is a baby Buddha, a baby Bodhisattva that could help me to go back to myself. And you breath in and out three times. If you remember the gatha, that's wonderful. But if you don't remember the gatha, it's okay with just breathing in and breathing out: "Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness, I send my heart along with the sound of this bell, may the hearers awaken from forgetfulness, and transcend the heart of anxiety and sorrow."

You have to practice in your own language. You've got to have an Italian translation if you are an Italian boy or girl. If you are Dutch, then you should have a gatha in Dutch. It's nice to practice. You can even put it into music. And you can meditate in music. Why not? In Vietnamese we chant it in music. When we finish chanting it, either in silence or with the words, we feel much better already.

Now we touch the bell with the inviter. We don't call it a stick. Bell inviter. We say "invite the bell to sound." We don't say "hit the bell." We want to be kind. This is the act of waking up the bell. You do not want to do violence to the bell. You announce to the bell that you are going to invite it strongly, so that everyone can hear--this is waking the bell up. The waking up sound is made by touching the bell inviter to the bell. But instead of removing it you just keep it there, so that the sound is only a half sound. Everyone in the community and everyone in the house knows that a really loud sound will be heard, so there is no surprise. Everyone has the chance to prepare himself or herself for the call of the Buddha. The Buddha is going to call you. So you already practice breathing in, while waiting for the real sound, and then the real sound comes.

[Bell]

That is the voice of the Buddha inside you calling you back to your true home, the home of peace, the home of tolerance, the home of love. When you hear the sound, you practice breathing in and out according to another gatha. Of course you know by heart: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile." But the other gatha is "Listen, listen; this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." You say "Listen, listen;" it means I listen, I listen, that's when you breathe in, and when you breathe out, you smile and you say "this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." This is the voice of the Buddha inside. If you do that three times, you feel much better. Peace has become something real. You don't suffer like a few minutes before. And you know something? Your mommy hears it. She is not in the room but she hears it. She is very proud of her child who tries hard to take care of his or her anger. The next time when she gets angry, I'm sure that she will do like you. Instead of shouting, she will go to the breathing room, she will practice like you.

Only one person practices, but the practice benefit all the other people. Your daddy may be angry, but at the sound of the bell he may be released from his anger. All his children are practicing peace, practicing taking good care of their anger. So when the atmosphere of the family has become difficult for you to breathe, you should not stay there and bear. Because when mommy and daddy get angry with each other there is something like a storm hanging in the air and that is not healthy for the children, because the heavy atmosphere penetrates into the child. It's not healthy for the child and the child has no escape.

In the old times our home was surrounded by a big garden, and every time the child happened to be in an atmosphere of tension, he could always run out and play with the lake, the pond,

the dragonfly, the butterfly, or he might go to an uncle, or an aunt, or a cousin. But now we live in a very small apartment house, no uncle, no aunt, no cousin, no lotus pond, no coconut tree, nothing, only cars below, a lot of noise, a lot of dust. The child has no escape. Sometimes the child takes refuge in the bathroom. She suffers so much, she locks the bathroom from inside and her parents do not know that their child suffers so terribly in the bathroom. But you are not safe, entirely safe, in the bathroom because the sound and the atmosphere of tension breaks through the door and comes in. It continues to afflict you. So it is very hard for children in our days. Therefore the breathing room, the room of peace, is a solution for the twenty-first century. Please, you who are architects, who sit there, listen to us. Design us a home where we have a territory of peace, where we can have an island of peace in the midst of the ocean of turbulence. Design us the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land in our modern home, please. You who are artists, help us to decorate that room, to arrange that room so that we will have a chance, we will have an escape.

While you are practicing breathing, and touching peace, and restoring peace, your mother may be interested in doing the same. My child is practicing alone. I should go there and support him. Very kind of her. So instead of cutting carrots, she says, "Well, I can cut my carrot later on. I should join my child now." So she puts down the knife, she goes slowly in the direction of the peace room and she practices walking meditation, and suddenly you hear the sound of the door. You guess that your mommy is coming to join you. And you feel happy. It is very nice to be practicing with a Dharma sister who is your mother. Then you feel that she has come and she sits down just behind you and she practices breathing in and out. Now you feel supported. I think that this is one of the most beautiful things you can see in life, mother and son or daughter sitting quietly in the lotus position and practicing breathing in and out to restore peace. If you are a painter, please draw us that painting. If you are a musician, then write a piece of music on that.

And daddy, what is he thinking, sitting alone outside? I think his love for you and for your mommy is always there. Sometimes it is covered up by some irritation, but the love is still there intact. Your practice of breathing and taking good care of your irritation, anger, will move him. It would be no surprise if he will join you later on. Happiness is something possible. You don't have to go to the supermarket and buy anything at all. Suddenly happiness comes down to your family. That is one idea concerning our home for the twenty-first century. And the children please have a Dharma discussion today. Find out what you like about the breathing room, the peace room in the house -- the embassy of the Buddha in your own home.

Another idea concerning the home of the twenty-first century is a garden where there is a path for walking meditation. Because walking meditation can release a lot of tension, can help you to touch the beauty of life, of nature. That garden may be a collective garden of a group of houses. That garden should be designed in such a way that it expresses love and compassion and harmony. The garden should present nature, real nature, not artificial. No chemicals, no insecticides, should be used in that garden. You should not use the kind of weed killer that destroy the soil. You should use only organic means to build up that beautiful garden. You must respect the right of living beings to cohabit with us in the garden. We should be able to meet the snail in the garden.

If the lotus flower in the garden is covered by many small living beings and cannot flower, then you should not use violent insecticides. Maybe you should try garlic or onion. You crush pieces of garlic and onion and you mix up with some water and you spray. And these small living beings will go to another place to be and leave your lotus flower to bloom. How do you do it in the Upper Hamlet? I have seen two tiny flowers, lotus flowers covered with so many tiny living beings. I know that you don't have the idea of killing them, but we should try means like that. I learned that if you cultivate vegetables together with garlic or onion then you can keep these insects away. There are many nonviolent ways of growing a garden. You

who are experts on organic gardening, you have to tell us how to build up such a garden. Such a garden is the garden of Eden. It is a real place for children and adults at the same time. If you cannot afford to have a private garden at home then you should arrange it so that a complex of houses enjoys a collective garden, where people collectively take good care of the garden and practice love and kindness, harmony and cohabitation with other living beings.

[Bell]

Young people, as soon as you have built your home in the twenty-first century please don't forget to invite me. I will be very glad to come to be in your garden, and to sit in your peace room, and breathe in and out with you, and I promise that I will bring along my teapot and prepare tea for you. When you hear the little bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha.

[Bell]

Yesterday during the question and answer time I was able to talk to you about how to take care of our sorrow, our sickness. You need to organize Dharma discussions in small groups to deepen our understanding of how to practice it. Instead of fighting our pain, our anger, our depression, we try to take good care of it — the way a mother would take care of her child.

Today, I would like to offer you another way of taking care of your pain. How to bear your pain easily. How to live with your pain. How to accept it with suffering so much. It's fine if you can transform it, but while it is still there, there are ways that you can live in peace with it. The Buddhist teaching on this is very clear, very concrete. It has to do with the teaching of love. We have to practice love directed to our own self, body and mind. We should learn how to love, and first to love our self. Love is not just the will to love. Love is the capacity of reducing the pain and offering the peace and the happiness. All these are practice. And you can practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha we speak of getting to the other shore, *paramita*. *Paramita* means from this shore you go to the other shore. From the shore of suffering you cross the river to go to the shore of emancipation, of non-suffering. How long does it take for you to come from this shore to the other shore? Sometimes you can do it very quickly. If you have an irritation, you are on this shore. If you know how to take good care of your irritation it will be transformed in just a few minutes, and suddenly you are on the other shore. Please do not think that Bodhisattvas or Buddhas alone can go to the other shore. You, you can do that, too. Several times a day. Every time you are subject, you are the victim of an affliction, like anger, hatred, fear, irritation, you can always practice crossing the river to go to the other shore. The Buddha said if you want to go to the other shore, don't just stay here and pray. "Please, the other shore come here so that I can step on you." The Buddha said you should not do like that. You can go to the other shore only by crossing, either you use a ferry boat or you swim. You cannot pray for the other shore to come. And the ferry boat is the Dharma. The Buddha always said "My teaching is a raft for you to cross the river of suffering. Use it as a raft and not as something you carry on your head." So as a good practitioner you should get the raft, the ferry boat, in order to be able to cross the river of suffering by ourselves. We should learn the way, the Dharma.

The method I'm going to present to you is called the practice of the immeasurable mind. A mind that can be measured is not a very big mind. A heart that can be measured is not a large heart. That is why you have to practice the unmeasurable heart, which is a very important teaching of the Buddha. There are four elements that make up true love. It is *maitri*, translated as loving kindness, *karuna*, translated as compassion, *mudita*, translated as joy, and *upeksha*, translated as equanimity, nondiscrimination. We practice so that these element of true love will make our heart into something unmeasurable. This is something we practice in our daily life. As our heart begins to expand, to grow large, we are able to contain, to bear, any kind of suffering. It may be that we don't suffer at all, even if we embrace the suffering within us.

In the six *paramitas*, the six boats crossing the ocean of suffering, we have the boat of charity, meaning forbearance. Forbearance is the capacity to embrace difficulties, to embrace the pain,

and not suffer. If your heart is large, you can embrace any amount of pain and yet you don't suffer. That is one of six boats carrying us to the other shore.

Forbearance does not mean that you try to suppress the pain. The Chinese way of writing is this: this is the heart and this is a kind of sharp knife that can cause the pain. The heart is so big that even if the knife is there it does not affect it, and finally the knife is transformed into a non-knife element. The Buddha used a very wonderful image, and he used it several times in his lifetime of teaching. He said suppose you have something dirty, if you pour it into your water container then that water you cannot drink. No one can drink such water. If you pour urine, some excrement, or something you spit out from your stomach, then you can't use the whole container of water, you have to throw it away. Even a tiny bit of dirt falling into your glass, you cannot drink it. But if you throw that container of dirt into a large river. If you throw the dirt, maybe one kilo, or ten kilos, into an immense river, people in the whole area can still drink water from the river. That's because the river is big, and it takes no time at all for the river to transform the dirt. Overnight the dirt will not be there, because a huge amount of water is circulating. The whole amount of mud underneath will be able to transform the dirt you threw yesterday and the river becomes limpid, entirely ready for you to drink.

The difference is not whether or not you throw the dirt in. You throw the dirt, the dirt is real, existent. But if your container is small, then the whole thing has to be thrown away. But if it is a big container, it is a big river, then it can embrace the dirt very easily and it will transform the dirt very quickly, just overnight. Your heart, also, if your heart is small, then you cannot bear the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on you by society, by another person. But if your heart is large, you can very well live with it. You can embrace it, and you don't have to suffer. So the practice of the four immeasurable minds is to blow up your heart until it becomes a big river. And the way of making your heart big is to use the instruments of *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upeksha*. The essence of it is the practice of meditation, of looking deeply.

Yesterday we spoke about salvation by insight. You can only be saved, you can only be liberated by your insight. And how could insight come? You have to practice concentration. You have to practice looking deeply, and as you continue to practice looking deeply, the insight will come and liberate you from your suffering.

Mencius was a Chinese philosopher, very well known. He lost his father when he was very young, and his mother had to move into a poor quarter of the city to make a living. She stayed up very late in the night to do the work of weaving. One day the little boy came home very dirty, with his clothes all torn. He just had a fight with the children in the neighborhood. He became something like a delinquent child. She got angry, because she had great expectations of her little boy. She was doing the work of weaving. She stopped and she was about to punish him, to shout at him. Suddenly she stopped, because insight came to her. She was able to see that in the neighborhood there was no school. There was only a slaughter house. The children didn't go to school. They spent time playing on the road and playing games like slaughtering a pig or a calf. If the adults do things, then the children imitate. They would use a raw sweet potato to represent a cow, they used four incense sticks for legs of the cow, and they gathered and performed the killing. They imitated adults. And of course they would fight each other and say rough words to each other. That is the environment in which the mother of the boy had put him. On the verge of shouting at him, the mother realized that it's her fault. Any child put into that environment will become the same. So she did not do anything and she was not angry anymore. That is salvation by insight.

Instead she stayed up later into the night, worked harder and saved money. She had an intention to move to another quarter of the city. Three months later she was able to move to a better neighborhood, where there was a school, where the children were clean and polite. She did not have to punish the child, to shout at him, to suffer. The boy after that became a very intelligent, hard-working student, and finally became a very famous philosopher.

You don't have to suffer if you have insight -- if you understand and that understanding is the fruit of deep looking. If we suffer so much, it is because we are ignorant. If we get angry at our father, at our mother, our son, our daughter, or our partner, it is because we are still ignorant. Practice in looking deeply will allow you to see how the other person has become like that. He was not like that when you married him, but now he is like this, like this, very hard to be with. And who is responsible? Put the questions in front of you and meditate. When I first married him, he was not like that. When I first married her, she was not like that. Why has she become so unbearable today? Who is responsible? Should I blame her, or should I blame myself, or should I blame society? All these questions help with our meditation. To meditate means to confront reality and not to escape. If you are running away from your real problems, you are not meditating correctly. You need to sit in a mound of calm, of concentration. You need to sit in a mound of mindfulness in order to confront these hardships and to look into the nature of this suffering.

[Bell]

If your father considers you to be his property, like a house or a sum of money or a car; if he considers you something like one of his belongings, he thinks he can do anything with you because you are his child, his son or his daughter. He does not know that you are a person, a human being, with the right to think and to act and to follow what you believe to be beautiful, good, and true. He only wants you to follow the path he has traced for you. You have to ask why? Why is your father like that, because around us there are fathers who are different? There are fathers who are capable of treating their sons and their daughters as free living beings with a lot of respect. I have a practice and I treat my students with respect, even if they are very small, because I have the insight that only by treating them like that could the best thing in them come out. And that's not only for their sake, but my sake, and the sake of many people, many living beings. Because I know how to treat my students like that I have been able to bring out so many talents that are buried in each of them. If you ask why I can do like that, it's because I have been lucky. I have had the teacher. I have had Dharma brothers, and sisters. I have learned the Dharma, so the Buddha has opened my eyes. I'm liberated from my narrowness, my prejudices.

If your father has not been able to be like that because he was just unlucky, if you blame him, if you want to punish him, he will suffer more, that's all. You cannot help him. Only when you say "Daddy, I understand you, why you are like that. I would prefer that you are not like that, but what can I do? Your education was like that. Your environment was like that. You were not in touch with the kind of teaching or insight that has a liberating nature." You don't say it, but you tell yourself about it. Suddenly, your hatred, your anger toward your father just vanishes. Your father becomes someone who needs your help, your love, rather than your punishment. Running away from your father is a way to punish him. You want him to suffer. That is why you run away from him. Even if you kill yourself, it is with the intention to make him suffer. You say, "You see, I killed myself because of you. I want you to suffer because you have treated me like an animal, like a possession of yours." So even if you kill yourself, if you run away from home, that is not inflicting the suffering on yourself, but the will to harm, the will to make suffer the person you think to be the cause of your suffering.

Between parents and children there is a fight. If you don't practice, if you are not wise, if the elements of *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upeksha* are not there in our love, then we create hell for each other. Always in the fight between parents and children, it is the children who are the losers, because children are not supposed to speak back with the terms used by parents. The parents may beat their children, but the children cannot beat their parents. The parents can abuse their children with words, but children cannot do that. Because they cannot express the violence they have received, that is why they get sick. The violence they receive stays within them and seeks the way to go out, to get expressed. If the young person hangs himself, or shoots himself, that is, he wants to express his anger, his frustration, his violence, there is no

other way out. So if you inflict something on yourself, it is because you have no other ways of expressing the violence in you, the hatred, and the anger in you. You are the victim of the violence you have received from your parents and from society.

Poor young child. She did not have any means to protect herself, to protect himself. The parents are not wise enough not to pour their violence on the children, even if they intend to love them and make them happy. I know of a young man, who reacted to his father, who is a medical doctor. The medical doctor had been my student when he was studying medicine. He sounds like a young man of the new generation. He promised to himself that he would be the kind of father who would be different from his father. But when he became a father, he did exactly the same thing as the father had done to him. You hate your father. You promised that when you grow up you will not be like your father. You will do the opposite of your father. Yet, when you grow up you get married, you have children, you do exactly like him. That is the wheel of *samsara*. To practice is to cut through the wheel of *samsara*. You don't allow it to continue, with you and with your children.

So, in the light of this practice, both generations must make an effort. We should recognize the violence in us. The kind of violence that is destroying us, and destroying the person we love. All intentions, even all intentions to love and to make that person happy, make him, make her, suffer.

So how to help the parents handle the violence, their suffering, so that they will not pour it on their children? How to help the children, how to take care of their violence, how to transform it, not to hate their parents? Both parties have to seek the path of deep looking because both generations are just victims. The children think they are victims of their parents, and the parents think they are victims of the children. Children of other families find out they are not like my children, so we continue to blame each other. We don't accept the fact that violence is inside of both of us. Instead of fighting each other, we should come together and find a way out, between parents and children, between partner and partner. It is not because we have suffered that we have to make each other continue to suffer. We suffer very much because of the same reason. Therefore we should be allies for each other rather than enemies. The amount of suffering in us is enough to instruct us how to not make the same mistake. The Buddha said "What has come to be, you should practice looking deeply into its nature." Once you begin to understand its nature, how it has come to be, then you are already on a path of liberation.

So partner has to come to partner and agreed on the fact that both of us have suffered. Both of us have violence, hatred, afflictions in us. Instead of opposing each other, blaming each other, we should help each other, practicing together, and you do that in the context of a Sangha, with the help of a teacher, or many teachers, many brothers, sisters in the Dharma. Because everyone has practice, everyone can try and help bring light into your suffering and help you to practice. In the beginning, walking is difficult, but walking with a few friends in the Dharma, make it easier. In the beginning breathing is not natural, it is something like forcing you to do things that are not natural. But finally with the support of brothers and sisters in the Dharma, you find breathing is wonderful, natural, calming, refreshing, transforming.

We feel that we are victim of injustice. Most of us, not to say all of us, feel somehow we are the victims of many forms of injustice, coming from parents, from ancestors, from nature, from society. We feel that no one understands us. It's very hard for us to accept what has come to us. Suffering is there, real. The Buddha said the first truth, the first of the four noble truths, is the presence of suffering, the existence of suffering, *dukkha*.

A two year old child, struck with hate, a child born crippled, you cannot bear it, you blame God. If God exists, how could God allow such a thing to happen? You are very young, suddenly you have cancer. You cannot believe it. Have you done anything to deserve that? If you cannot blame your parents, then you blame society, and if you don't find someone to blame, you look up and you blame God. The feeling of being a victim of injustice is always

there in every one of us. We are mistreated, and the more we feel that injustice in us, the more we suffer. The only way is to meditate, to understand.

Yesterday, I talked about the young person who is so angry with his father and who made that declaration. The young man said "I don't want to have anything to do with my father." We understand. The young man was so angry. He felt that all his suffering has come from his father. He wants to be entirely other than his father. He doesn't want to hear anything about his father, to see anything about his father. He wants to be completely cut off from that part of existence. But if he practices looking deeply, he will see that he is only his father. He is only the continuation of his father, even if he hates his father with his whole being. Hating his father is hating himself. That is something we get when we practice looking deeply. There is no alternative, except accepting your father, embrace your father. If your heart is small, you cannot embrace him, you've got to have a big heart. How to make your heart big, so that there is enough room to embrace your father?

The practice of looking deeply is the only practice that helps your heart to expand, the unmeasurable mind, the unmeasurable heart. When you look deeply, you begin to understand why your father is like that, why you are like that. You see that both you and your father are victims. If you put yourself into the situation of your father, you would do exactly the same thing as he has done. Just looking around you see that. Many young men hate their fathers, promise that they will do exactly the opposite, but they have done exactly the things that their fathers have done: samsara. So with that kind of insight you can no longer be angry. Insight helps your heart to expand, and suddenly you have plenty of place and your father can be embraced in yourself. Love become possible -- hatred, anger, just transforms into love. What a miracle. It is *vipassana*, the practice of looking deeply, that can perform that miracle. Salvation by insight, by understanding.

You blame your sickness, you complain that you are sick, you are ill. You think that it is very difficult to bear your illness. It makes you suffer so much. Even if it is physical pain, if you know how to practice making your heart grow big, then you have the capacity of accepting the physical pain very easily. You fancy that if you pray to God, if you pray to Avalokiteshvara, if you've got a talented doctor, then you will have perfect health. And usually we enjoy perfect health. But the idea of perfect health is just the outcome of ignorance. There is no such a thing as perfect health. If you are still alive, that is because during your childhood you were ill a lot, got sick a lot, and by getting sick like that you developed the immune system, because the fungi, bacteria, the viruses are always there, ready to attack. You can die very easily because of them. You have survived, because during your childhood you were very often sick, and during the time of sickness you had an opportunity to learn how to release the antibodies in you that were developed. So thanks to that time of illness, that happened during your childhood, you are still alive today. So if you have some kind of illness today, you have to practice looking deeply in order to accept it and live in peace with it.

There are four basic diseases with which all of us are struck, whether we want them or not. The first disease is death. I carry that disease in me, you also, death, you have to die someday. The Buddha reminds us to practice the five awarenesses. I am of the nature to die. I cannot escape dying. Death is a disease that strikes everyone and you carry it with you. You may say "I have cancer. I will die in three months. You don't have cancer. You don't have to die." That's not correct. We may die a little bit after you, but we will have to die. And it is not sure that we will die after you. You have cancer, but maybe you live longer. Impermanence, who knows. So every one of us is struck by that basic disease, death.

The second disease is old age. All of us bear the disease, carry the disease inside. The Buddha said "I am the nature to grow old, I cannot escape old age." The third disease is sickness. I am of the nature to get sick, I cannot be free from sickness. So it is better to learn to accept sickness then to fight. The more you fight, the more you suffer.

Then, I am of the nature to be born again. It is a horrible thing to be born again to many people, because throughout their life they have suffered so much that they wish they will never be reborn. Sometimes we celebrate our birthday, but there are those that are very afraid of being born again. Do you want to live forever? Can you bear the thought that you have to live forever? It's very frightening if you are not allowed to die. Sometimes we are so tired, sometimes we suffer so much, that we think that to die is the only way to liberate us. Sometimes we suffer because of illness. We cannot eat by ourselves, we cannot walk and many people have to attend to us. We are completely useless in this life and yet we are condemned to live forever. If someone comes and says "If you want to live, to live forever, you will get it, sign here." I think you will be frightened. That is a kind of sentence, most frightening. You are struck by the disease of being born. Because being born means you have to go through again. You will have to go through again what you have been through. After you die, you will be reborn in order to do the same. Very frightening.

But these four diseases, birth, old age, sickness, and death can be overcome, just by the practice of looking deeply. The scripture called the Heart Sutra is an instrument for you to practice. If you practice, if you have the luxury of practicing the Heart Sutra, then one day you will be able to touch the world of no birth and no death. "Listen Shariputra, things are in themselves empty, nothing is created, nothing dies. There is no coming, no going, no being, no non-being." That is the finger pointing to the world, to the world of no birth and no death. If you know how to practice touching the world of no birth, no death, then you overcome the fear of these four diseases, birth, sickness, old age, death. Your heart, your understanding, becomes so immense, that looking at the so-called birth, death, disease, old age, you just smile. You are not afraid at all.

Suppose there is a wave, a wave that is living its life as a wave. There is one moment when the wave is born, there is one moment when the wave reaches its highest peak, there is one moment when the wave begins to go down, and there is one moment when the wave disappears on the surface of the ocean. The wave is so busy, paying attention to outer appearances, the wave has never been able to touch its true essence that is water. Yes, concerning a wave there is birth, death, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful. But concerning water, there is no birth, no death, no high, no low, no being, no non-being. If the wave is able to touch its nature as water, it will overcome all fear, all suffering, caused by the idea of birth, death, high, low, ugly, beautiful.

The only way is to practice looking deeply, to have insight. Therefore the suffering, even if it is there, whether coming from society, coming from parents, coming from children, coming from friends, coming from war, from sickness, if you get the knowledge, if you get the insight, if your heart becomes immeasurable, if you can touch the true nature of no birth and no death, you can very easily embrace all these kinds of suffering. And you don't have to suffer. That is the teaching of *shanti paramita*.

New Century Message from Thich Nhat Hanh

Tu Hieu Temple and Plum Village, December 7, 1999

To All Venerable Monks, Nuns, Lay Men And Lay Women Of The Sangha In The Tu Hieu Lineage, Inside And Outside Of Vietnam

Dear Friends,

The Twentieth Century has been marred by mass violence and enormous bloodshed. With the development of technology, humanity now has the power to "conquer" Nature. We have even begun to intervene in the chemistry of life, adapting it to our own ends. At the same time, despite new and faster ways to communicate, we have become very lonely. Many have no spiritual beliefs. With no spiritual ground, we live only with the desire to satisfy our private pleasures.

We no longer believe in any ideology or faith, and many proclaim that God is dead. Without an ideal and a direction for our lives, we have been uprooted from our spiritual traditions, our ancestors, our family, and our society. Many of us, particularly young people, are heading towards a life of consumption and self-destruction.

Ideological wars, AIDS, cancer, mental illness, and alcohol and drug addiction have become major burdens of this century. At the same time, progress in the fields of electronic and biological technology are creating new powers for mankind. In the 21st century, if humans cannot master themselves, these new powers will lead us and other living beings to mass destruction.

During the 20th century many seeds of wisdom have also sprouted. Science, especially physics and biology, has discovered the nature of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self. The fields of psychology and sociology have discovered much of these same truths. We know that this is, because that is, and this is like this, because that is like that. We know that we will live together or die together, and that without understanding, love is impossible.

From these insights, many positive efforts have recently been made. Many of us have worked to take care of the environment, to care for animals in a compassionate way, to reduce the consumption of meat, to abandon smoking and drinking alcohol, to do social relief work in underdeveloped countries, to campaign for peace and human rights, to promote simple living and consumption of health food, and to learn the practice of Buddhism as an art of living, aimed at transformation and healing. If we are able to recognize these positive developments of wisdom and action, they will become a bright torch of enlightenment, capable of showing mankind the right path to follow in the 21st century. Science and technology can then be reoriented to help build a new way of life moving in the direction of a living insight, as expressed in terms of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self.

If the 20th century was the century of humans conquering Nature, the 21st century should be one in which we conquer the root causes of the suffering in human beings—our fears, ego, hatred, greed, etc. If the 20th century was characterized by individualism and consumption, the 21st century can be characterized by the insights of interbeing. In the 21st century, humans can live together in true harmony with each other and with nature, as bees live together in their bee hive or as cells live together in the same body, all in a real spirit of democracy and equality. Freedom will no longer be just a kind of liberty for self-destruction, or destruction of the environment, but the kind of freedom that protects us from being overwhelmed and carried away by craving, hatred, and pain.

The art of mindful living expressed in concrete terms, as found in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, can be the way for all of us. The Trainings point us in the right direction for the

21st century. Returning to one's root spiritual tradition, we can find and restore the equivalent values and insights. This is a most urgent task for us all.

I respectfully propose to all Venerable Monks, Nuns, and Lay people within our Tù Híêu lineage, in Vietnam and outside of Vietnam, to carefully reflect upon the following recommendations, and to contribute some part in helping to create the direction for mankind in the New Century:

1. We should continue to set up monasteries and practice centers. These centers can organize retreats—one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days, ninety days, etc.—for monastics and for lay people, aimed at developing our capacity for transformation and healing. Activities at these centers should cultivate understanding and compassion and teach the art of Sangha building. Temples and practice centers should embody a true spiritual life, and should be places where young people can get in touch with their spiritual roots. They should be centers where the practice of non-attachment to views according to the Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing can be experienced. To cultivate tolerance according to these trainings will prevent our country and mankind from getting caught in future cycles of religious and ideological wars.

2. We should study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings in the context of a family, and establish our family as the basic unit for a larger Sangha. Practicing deep listening and mindful speech, we will create harmony and happiness, and feel rooted in our own family. Each family should set up a home altar for spiritual and blood ancestors. On important days, the entire family should gather to cultivate the awareness and appreciation of their roots and origins, thus deepening their consciousness of these spiritual and blood ancestors. Accepting the stream of ancestors in our own being, we draw on their strengths and recognize their weaknesses, in order to transform generations of suffering. Each family should recognize the importance of having one member of their family devote his or her life to the learning and practice of the Dharma, as a monastic or a lay person. The family should invest in, support, and encourage this family member.

3. We should give up our lives of feverish consumption, and transfer all merits of action created by thoughts, speech, and work to the Sangha. Our happiness should arise from understanding, compassion, and harmony, and not from consumption. We should see the happiness of the Sangha as our own happiness.

4. We should invest the time and energy of our daily life in the noble task of Sangha building. We should share material things that can be used collectively by the Sangha, such as houses, cars, television, computers, etc. We should give up alcohol, drugs, and smoking. We should learn to live simply, so that we may have more time to live our daily life deeply and with freedom. Living simply, we become capable of touching the wonders of life, of transformation and healing, and of realizing our ideal of compassion in the educational, cultural, spiritual, and social domains of our lives.

The 21st century is a green, beautiful hill with an immense space, having stars, moons, and all wonders of life. Let us climb the hill of the next century, not as separate individuals but as a Sangha.

Let us go together, hand in hand, with our spiritual and blood ancestors, and our children. Let us enjoy the climb together with our songs and our smiles, and allow each step to create freedom and joy and peace.

Wishing you and your Sangha a wonderful century full of faith and happiness,

Thich Nhat Hanh

Elder of the Tu Hieu Lineage

Be Like the Earth — The Practice of Forbearance

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 23, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, dear friends.

Today is the twenty-third of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

Two days ago in a Dharma talk in English, I asked the children to name that room in our modern home where we can have peace, where we can practice peace, where we can restore our peace. About fourteen years ago I called it a "breathing room," but there must be better names for that room. Of course in that room we can practice breathing and restoring ourselves. But I guess that the children can help propose a beautiful name for that room. Those who are new arrivals should be told a little bit about that.

We said that in our home there is a room for everything—like a guest room, a room for eating, a room for playing, a room for sitting and watching television—but we need a room where we can be really at peace. No one can shout at us when we go into that room. When the atmosphere in the family is not light, is difficult to bear, we can always have some place to go to be ourselves. No one can pursue us into that room in order to continue asking questions, or saying things that we don't want to listen to. We may call it the "Embassy of the Buddha," where you can seek asylum. We can call it the "territory of peace," the "Pure Land," the "meditation corner." Please come up with some better name that fits.

When we look at the village, we see there is a church or a temple in the village. That church or temple plays the role of spiritual leadership. It used to be a higher building than the other houses, and it was surrounded with trees and so on. And we used to think of it with love, with peace, because we knew that when we went there, we could be rid of the annoying things of everyday life. But somehow the church or the temple has lost the role of leadership. Many of us don't feel comfortable anymore when we think of the church or of the temple. Whose fault is that? We should not blame anyone in particular. We are co-responsible for that. A church not playing well the role of a church, a temple not playing well the role of a temple, that is our responsibility. We have to restore the spiritual leadership of a church, of the temple. But do we have the right and the power to do so? We are not the church people. We are not the temple people. Can we decide how to rearrange the church and the temple so that it will fit our spiritual need? Because in our daily life we need peace, we need harmony, we need quiet, we need communion—but they no longer provide us with that. Of course, we may have the right to speak out, that we need this and that.

But in our home of the twenty-first century—we still have four years to prepare for our modern home. At least we have that room in our home to play the role of leadership. We talked about the furniture in that room, we talked about a few cushions, we talked about a little table with a little flower pot, we talked about a little bell so that we can practice breathing and calming ourselves. To me, a civilized home should have such a room. It is the heart of our home. Everyone in the family has to sign an agreement, a treaty, that the space of the room should not be violated by anyone, including the father, the mother. Once you enter the room there is no right to shout, there is no right to have rough words or gestures, because that is the territory of mindfulness, that is the territory of peace, and everyone has to show his or her reverence, respect. Because if we lose that respect and reverence, then there is nothing left. So please help find a name that fits that room. It will play the role of the church and the temple in our home. We will learn how to maintain that room, how to arrange that room, how to practice in that room, so that peace and harmony in our new home become something real—for the sake of all of us. The children already have discussed this, and I ask you to continue it today.

We also discussed the green space so that many houses in the area can profit—a kind of garden, a kind of Buddha garden. You might like to call it a Sangha garden. Because the

central park is too big—the central park is for the whole city. We are talking about a little park, for a group of houses only. Because if each house has got to have a room that represents the territory of peace, then the hamlet—a group of houses, like fifteen, twenty, or thirty houses—should possess a space, green, natural, where the harmony of nature should be respected. I propose that in that mini-park there is a playground for children, a space where children can jump and run. Because we do need it, and it is a pleasure for people like me to sit and watch the children running and shouting and playing. We need that very much.

And then there should be a path for walking meditation. Every home needs to have such a path. When you are engaged on the path of walking meditation, you have the right to walk slowly, and in silence. A group of houses should make a kind of agreement on how to maintain and use that little communal park. I cannot survive without the path of walking meditation, I am so used to it. It's like food. If I have no time, no chance, no place to practice walking every day, I don't feel completely happy. I can be happy, but my happiness is not perfect. The walking has become part of my daily life. Every time I have five or ten minutes, I like to use it for walking meditation. Each step brings me a lot of joy. During the walk I pay attention to nature, to every creature that is there—a butterfly, a snail, a little flower, a dry ripe leaf. I don't want to call it a dead leaf. I like to call it a "ripe" leaf.

And I like to see mother taking the hand of daughter, practicing walking meditation, teaching daughter to breathe in and out, to calm her emotions. I would like to see father taking the hand of son, walking meditation. I would like to see them sitting on the grass together, practicing looking at the blue sky, smiling. We don't need to be riding in a motor car very quickly in order to enjoy life. We can just sit. I guess riding in a motor car is fine, but you might disturb people if the sound of the motor car is too big. And you risk polluting the air and you may reduce the happiness of other people, because you make the quality of the air poorer. So we have to be mindful. In that space of nature, of harmony, we should delegate members of the community who know how to maintain the harmony and the beauty of the little park, for the pleasure of everyone. We should make our walking meditation path beautiful, available to everyone. I hope there are several paths for walking meditation because I do wish that every house, every family, will at least have the opportunity to practice walking meditation every day.

After having worked for one hour, one hour and a half—whether manual work or intellectual work—I always like and need walking meditation outdoors. Yesterday, I had one article to edit. I like editing an article—I like words, I like grammar, I like ideas, I like images, I like poetry—yes. But after about one hour of being together with a pencil (I still don't use a computer yet) and the sheet of paper, I looked up through the window and I saw that young palm tree, so beautiful it looks like it just came out fresh from paradise. It's so appealing that I said, "Although I like editing, the nature outside is so inviting." So my heart vibrated with happiness—I saw that the Pure Land, that paradise, is available. I was like a child. I wanted to come and touch the palm tree.

I have to tell you a little bit of the story of that palm tree: I was in Germany and practicing cleaning my intestines together with other friends. I was fasting several days, just drinking herb tea. One night I saw myself practicing walking in a beautiful park. I was made very mindful during the dream. I touched the bark of the trees mindfully, and enjoyed every detail of the bark of the trees. At one point, I was walking along a path where the vegetation is very green, very young palm trees of this height on my left, and I stopped, and I looked, and I said, "This green is so beautiful, so deep," and I was using my finger and touching it, mindfully. You know something? Mindfulness is possible in dreams. If you practice mindfulness, if you continue, there will be a time when you also practice mindfulness in dreams. And you enjoy it.

I remember a Zen master in China one day brought a number of visitors to visit the garden of the temple and he pointed to a bush, and he told his visitors, "Ladies and gentlemen: people of

our time, when they look at these leaves and flowers, they look at them as if they are in a dream." When I practice walking meditation, especially in the woods, I practice touching and looking at the vegetation in such a way that these things cannot be in a dream, should not, could not, be in a dream. And I have succeeded. That even in a dream, the bark of the tree, the palm tree, have become real also. So when I woke up I said, "The young palm tree in my dream is so beautiful." I told myself that when I go back to France I would like to plant a palm tree, plant it in my garden. Three days after I return to France, I went to the nursery and I found a very beautiful young palm tree, so I asked her to come to my garden.

[Bell]

I planted it in a place where I can see it a lot of times during the day. Every time I stop my work of editing, I look out and I see it. It is part of my Sangha, reminding me to be happy, to enjoy every moment of my daily life. So in that park, in that little park that belongs to the Sangha of new homes—about twenty or thirty homes—we should have a palm tree like that, or any kind of tree that you like to treat the way I treat my palm tree. You should rely on friends in the neighborhood who know how to talk to trees, how to take good care of trees, how to make trees into friends, members of our Sangha, how to arrange a beautiful walking meditation path. And there should be a place where we can sit down—just sit down. We don't need to talk or anything. If you know how to sit down, you'll be happy enough. The other day I talked about Nelson Mandela a week ago in the first Dharma talk of the summer opening. He was visiting France, and he was asked by a reporter what he needed the most. And he said, "The thing I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have had no time to sit down." Poor man.

We have come to Plum Village just to sit down. Don't waste your opportunity to sit down. You know how to sit down and not to worry, not to think about doing this or that, to lay down your burdens, your worries, your projects. Just sit down and feel that you are alive—with your son, with your daughter, with your partner, with your Dharma brother or sister. That's enough to be happy. Our sitting in the morning is just for sitting down. Our eating lunch at noon is also for sitting down. The Dharma talk is just an opportunity for us to sit down. So I am happy that the very young people can follow this Dharma talk, because it is very deep.

It is also my desire that in that little communal park, there is also something like a temple or a church, but you don't need to spend a lot of money building it. It must be a place where you can go in and feel protected by the atmosphere and environment. In fact, it is like the breathing room in your home. But now it is not for your family only, it is for twenty or thirty families living in the same area. And because it belongs to different spiritual traditions, that temple, that church, or that meditation hall should not bear any symbol.

There are friends in Florence, in Italy, who propose that they build a temple of peace on a hill of the city. There will be a place without any symbols and people of different spiritual traditions can come and sit together. No liturgy, no chanting, nothing, no statue. But beneath, there may be several halls in where different spiritual traditions can place their symbols—a Buddhist meditation hall, a Catholic praying place, and so on. That is a good idea. But I think in order to build a temple you need a lot of money and I'm not thinking of that. I'm thinking of a beautiful, quiet, simple place where families can come in and sit with other families and offer each other peace, quiet.

Talking about our home in the twenty-first century, we have to be aware of our real need and have to speak out about what we need. We have to talk to our architects, to our government, to our city council for what we need. Imagine a neighborhood where children have no place to go, where people only go to liquor shops and when they go back home, get drunk and shout at each other. There's no communication between families. The black people in that house have no relationship with the white people who live next door. When they meet each other, they don't say hello, there is no relationship at all. The children feel there's no space, no communication. Many children are delinquent, people are not happy with each other in the

family and they are not happy with neighbors and you don't feel safe living in such an area. So all these things should be discussed among us who live in the area and we have to rearrange our way of life, as families and as communities.

[Bell]

You may like to discuss this in order to bring our collective insight to organizing our homes in the twenty-first century. During the past week the children have been given teachings on how to breathe, how to practice sitting meditation, practice pebble meditation, and walking meditation.

Another practice we have learned is the practice of calling the names of some people we love. We select, say, five people that we love very much. We know that every time we call his or her name we feel happy, we feel the freshness, we feel the love. That practice is called "mindfulness of calling." For instance you love David. David is very close to you. You know about David. You know about his quality. You remember his smile. You remember his nice words. You remember his tenderness. So in the sitting position, while you breathe in, you call his name, "David." Mindful calling. You don't have to call it out loud. Just call him in your spirit, "David." Call his name in such a way that he becomes very real to you in that moment. Even if he's not there, if he's in North America, in Japan, yet he becomes very real to you in that moment, just one in-breath. Your success depends on how concentrated you are, how much you are interested in David's presence. That is why I ask you to select first the person you love the most. She may be your mommy, or your brother, or your best friend. And then when you breathe out you smile and you say, "Here I am." So in-breath is for calling him or her—to make him or her be real in the present moment. And during your out-breath you smile to him and you say, "Here I am." You bring yourself back entirely into the present moment—you and he, you and she, are real in the moment. That is the practice of mindfulness of calling.

There are those of us who want to call the Buddha—mindfulness of the calling of the Buddha. Maybe it is a little more difficult to call the Buddha if you are not very familiar with the Buddha. There are ways of practice so that we can see the Buddha in a very real way, as a person. Remember, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is just a human person like us. Every time I call the name of the Buddha, I really touch him, I really see him as someone very close to me. It's like when I call your name. The Buddha appears to me, very real, like yourself, like myself. It's like when I call the name of the full moon. When I look up at the full moon, I know that the full moon is there. And I want only to focus my attention, my whole attention, on the presence of the full moon. So I take an in-breath and I say, "full moon." And then full moon suddenly reveals herself to me very clearly. There's only the full moon at that moment. And when I breathe out, I smile and say, "Thank you for being there." So I and the full moon were very real in that moment. And I repeat, I do it two, three, four times, and my happiness increases all the time. I feel very alive in that moment.

So in your sitting meditation a time may be used just to call a few names in mindfulness. No matter who the person is—the person whose name you call, no matter who he or she is—mindfulness is always mindfulness. You might think that when you call the Buddha your mindfulness is more mindful. That's not true. Even if you call the full moon, mindfulness is true mindfulness. And mindfulness—guess what it is? Mindfulness is the Buddha. You don't need to call the Buddha in order for mindfulness to be the Buddha. Even if you call the snail or the dandelion or the full moon, your mindfulness is still the Buddha. The energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha. So call your mother's name, and the Buddha is there with your mother at the same time. I said mother is a kind of Buddha and Buddha is a kind of mother. Buddha is a kind of moon and moon is a kind of Buddha. It's wonderful! And there is the name of someone that you should try to call sometime later. That person needs you very much and you have very often forgotten her, forgotten him. And that person is yourself. Call your name and smile to him, smile to her. It's very important. You have neglected him, you

have been neglecting him a lot. He has suffered quite a lot. You have neglected her very much. She has been suffering, she needs your attention, your mindfulness, your embracing her with mindfulness. You've got to call her name, with compassion, with love.

You are welcome to stand up and to bow to the Sangha before you go out, but today I'm going to tell a very beautiful story in the Dharma talk. If you are interested, you might like to come back.

[Children leave Dharma hall]

Rahula is the son of the Buddha. A few years after enlightenment, the Buddha went back to his hometown, Kapilavastu, and visited his family. He was received by the king, his father, Suddhodana. He came back with many of his disciples—monks (at that time there were no nuns yet). He gave a beautiful Dharma talk to his father in the palace. The Dharma talk was attended by several informed people in the government, in the royal families, including his former friends. Siddhartha had a lot of friends before he left home and became a monk. Rahula was eight and Rahula was missing his father. That is why when the Buddha went back to his quarters in the vicinity of Kapilavastu with his monks, Rahula wanted to accompany him. Rahula loved the presence, the company of the Buddha, and he didn't want to go home. He wanted to stay in a monastery. One day he said, "Buddha, I want to live with you, I don't want to go home." Buddha said, "Okay." He told his disciple Shariputra to ordain Rahula as a novice. The grandpa was very angry because his son had become a monk, and now his grandson also was made a novice. But little Rahula was so happy living close to the Buddha and he practiced very well with the community of monks. When Rahula was eighteen, the Buddha gave him a very beautiful Dharma talk. I would like to share with you that Dharma talk today. The venerable Shariputra was there, standing behind the Buddha, and he listened to the Dharma talk and he received it very deeply, and he practiced it very deeply, even though the Dharma talk was given to a very young monk—Rahula.

In that Dharma talk, the Buddha advised Rahula to practice being the earth, the great earth. The Buddha said, "Rahula, practice so that you'll be like the earth." People might throw on the earth things like perfume, excrement, urine, all the dirty things, but the earth always receives all of that without anger. No matter whether it is the perfume or jewels or gold or silver or flowers or garbage or dirt or excrement or urine, the earth receives all of that without any resentment, any anger, because the earth is great, is large. The earth has the power to transform all these. You have a dead mouse in your kitchen. You want to get rid of it—where do you put it? You throw it to the earth. In no time at all, the earth transforms the dead mouse into something that you can accept. The earth has a great power of transformation, because the earth is great. So practice so that your heart becomes as great as the earth. You suffer only if you are small, if your heart is small. But when your heart is expanded you don't have to suffer. You don't need to make an effort to bear the suffering.

The other day I started with the image of a water container. It can contain something like fifty liters and if you throw something dirty into that container then you cannot drink that water any more—you have to throw the whole thing away. But if you throw that dirt on a big river, the river is immense, and the river water is still drinkable. In no time at all, the river with all the water and the mud transforms the dirt you throw into it, and everything will be perfect again. And the whole city continues to drink the water from the river. It's not that the river has to bear. We're talking about forbearance, endurance—as a boat to carry you to the other shore—*shanti-paramita*, "crossing to the other shore," the shore of happiness, joy, and liberation by the boat of forbearance.

If you make your heart as large as the earth then you can accept anything people do to you and say to you, without suffering. But if your heart is small, you suffer a lot. So Rahula practiced to be like the earth. That is the practice of love called the Four Immeasurable Minds. Because with the practice, your heart is growing and growing and growing, larger and larger all the time. And your heart will embrace everything, everyone—no enemy at all, there's no

enemy. Every time we praise the Buddha, we say, "Dear Buddha, your heart is so big and you embrace every living being with your heart, your compassion encircles the whole of the cosmos." Whether you call them friend or enemy, it's the same when your heart is big, you embrace them all, you love them all—whether they are cruel or less cruel, they are equally the object of your compassion.

So if you are a student of the Buddha try to practice so that your heart grows larger every day, and you won't have to suffer. Even if they say very mean and very cruel things to you, if they do cruel things to you, even if they try to suppress you and to kill you. How can you kill a river? How can you kill the earth? It is so huge. Some dirt cannot destroy the river because the river is so big. "Rahula, practice so that you will be like the water. Whether people throw into the water flowers, fragrance, food, milk, or urine or excrement or dead bodies of animals, the water will receive all without rancor, without resentment, without hatred; because the water has the capacity of washing everything. You can wash the bowl of the Buddha with the water, but you can wash also the dirty cloth, someone full of blood, the water receives everything and the water can wash everything, transform everything. So Rahula, please practice so that your heart will become something like water, you can receive everything without resentment and rancor.

"Rahula, practice like fire. Whether you throw into fire cloth or paper or flowers or dirty things, the fire accepts all and burns all. Whether it is fragrant or whether it stinks the fire accepts all and the fire reduces everything to ash and smoke. Because fire has the power to transform. Rahula, practice being like air. Whether you throw into the air something fragrant or something smelling bad, whether you burn incense or whether you burn rubber, the air accepts all because the air has the power to transform, because air is huge." The Buddha was instructing the young monk Rahula. But Shariputra, the tutor of Rahula, was standing there and absorbing every word of the Buddha and he was practicing that teaching for many, many years.

[Bell]

With the practice of mindful breathing, with the practice of looking deeply, you develop the four elements of your heart. And these four elements of your heart will expand your heart to infinity so that your heart will be like the heart of the Buddha, capable of embracing the whole cosmos. The four elements are *maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which in English means "compassion," *mudita*, which means "joy"— your practice should be joyful, otherwise it's not true practice; and finally, *upeksha*, equanimity—upeksha means "no discrimination." You love because the other person needs you, not because he is your countryman or he belongs to the same religion you do. No discrimination at all, that is true love.

One day, after finishing his rains retreat, the venerable Shariputra wanted to go north to visit another community that he had to care for. After he was gone, another monk went to the Buddha and complained about Shariputra: "My Lord, Shariputra is unbearable. He is too arrogant. I hate him. You trust him, you love him so much. But he is not worth your love and your trust. He plays too important a role in the Sangha. He teaches so many young monks and he has so much influence in the Sangha and that is not good for you, Lord, and not for him either. You know, my Lord, this morning when he was going out with his bowl I asked him, 'Shariputra, where are you going?' He didn't say anything. He did not even answer me. And with his left hand he pushed me and I fell to the ground, and he did not apologize, he just went out."

You know, Shariputra was the object of a lot of jealousy. Because he was so important a teacher, he was loved and appreciated by the Buddha. Shariputra is there, today, object of jealousy, object of anger, of hatred. I guess in his daily life Shariputra received a lot of things like that but fortunately he practices. The Buddha said, "When did Shariputra leave?" Ananda said, "Just this morning, my Lord. A few hours ago." "Could anyone go after him and ask him

to come back, we would like to see him?" Then a novice was sent by Ananda to go after Shariputra and to invite him back.

That afternoon Shariputra was back again at the Jeta monastery and the Buddha asked Ananda to convene a meeting of the Sangha. You can see Ananda holding a bunch of keys and going to each door and knocking, "Brothers, brother, come to tonight, there will be an important meeting." Then when everyone was there, the Buddha opened his mouth and spoke: "Bhikshu Shariputra, a brother of yours said this morning that when you were leaving the gate of the monastery he asked you where you were going, but you didn't care to answer him and then you pushed him, he fell to the floor, and you just continued your way without apologizing. Is that true?"

This is the answer offered by Shariputra. The answers of Shariputra have been recorded and became a sutra, and the sutra we call *The Lions Roar of Shariputra*. I will read to you a few lines. "Lord, you remember the lesson you gave fourteen years ago to the young Bhikshu Rahula, he was only eighteen years old at the time. You taught him to contemplate the nature of earth, water, fire, and air in order to nourish and develop the four virtues of loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Although your teaching was directed at Rahula, I learned from it also. I had made efforts to observe that teaching throughout the past fourteen years, and I have often thanked you in my heart.

"Lord, I have tried to practice to be more like earth. Earth is wide and open and has the capacity to receive and transform. Whether people toss pure and fragrant substances such as flowers, perfume, or fresh milk upon the earth, or toss unclean and foul-smelling substances such as excrement, urine, blood, mucous, and spit, on it, the earth receives it all equally with neither grasping nor aversion. Lord, I have contemplated to make my mind and body more like the earth. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like water. Whether someone pours fragrant substances or defiled substances into water, the water receives them both without grasping or aversion. Water is immense and flowing and has the capacity to transform and to purify. Respected Buddha, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like water. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like fire. Fire burns all things, the beautiful as well as the impure, without grasping or aversion. Fire has the ability to burn, purify, and transform. My Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like fire. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, mindfulness of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not such a monk.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like air. The air carries all manner of smells, good and bad, without grasping or aversion. Air has the capacity to transform, purify, and release. Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind become more like air. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of his body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, like a small, Untouchable child, with tattered, torn cloth who clasps a bowl and begs in the street for scraps of food, I practice to hold no false pride or arrogance. I have tried to make my heart like the heart of an Untouchable child's heart. I have tried to practice humility, not daring to place myself higher than others. My Lord, a monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of his actions and his speech, such a monk could knock down a fellow monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not a monk like that."

The venerable Shariputra continued speaking like that, but his accuser could bear it no longer. The other monk stood up and took away a piece of his sanghati robe to show his shoulder and bowed to the Buddha and joined his palms and he confessed, "Lord Buddha, I have violated the Precepts. I have born false witness against Shariputra. I confess that I had jealousy, anger, hatred in me. I confess my transgression before you and the entire community. I vow to observe my Precepts better in the future." The Buddha said, "It's good that you have confessed your transgression before the community. We are very glad you have done that." Then Shariputra rose also and he touched the ground in front of the other monk. "I bear no hatred, no anger against my brother and I ask him to forgive anything I may have done to upset him in the past." And both of them practiced Beginning Anew in front of the Buddha. The community saw that Shariputra did really practice in order for his heart to expand like the earth, like the water, like the fire, like the air. No matter what people told him, how mean it was, no matter how cruel were all the things they did to him, he could accept all of that without rancor, without suffering. That is the practice of true love in Buddhism.

True love consisting of loving kindness—the desire to offer happiness; of compassion—the desire to remove the pain from the other person; the desire to practice *mudita*—joy, to bring joy to people around; and *upeksha*—the desire to accept everything, not to discriminate. You love just because living beings need your love, not because he is your brother or sister, he belongs to your family, or your nation—no discrimination, that is *upeksha*.

[Bell]

If you still suffer, if you still believe that you are the victim of injustice, if you still think that they have wronged you, it means your heart is still not large enough, you have not become quite like air, or earth, or fire, or water. You still want to undo that injustice, to free yourself from injustice. You want the other person to be punished so that you will feel better because you have been the victim of terrible injustice. Injustice is the thing you see everywhere—a two year old child struck with cancer, a baby just born is already crippled, a couple of young people just married and have an accident that kills both. There are so many things like that happening around you. And you look at the sky and you say, "God is cruel. Where is justice? If God is love, if God is just, how could God allow these things to happen?" After having looked for justice from humankind, expecting the government, expecting the military, expecting the fellow human beings to repair the injustice done to you, and you don't succeed, then you have to look at the sky and you cry out your injustice to God.

Lao Tzu, the author of *Tao Te Ching*, said, "Sky and earth are inhuman, they treat living beings like a straw dog." Straw dog—a dog made with straw, just a toy. When you look closely at things, at people, at living beings, you see so much suffering, you see so much injustice you cannot explain, and you blame sky and earth, you blame God, you blame the Creator. You see that there are so many people who are good-hearted and who continue to suffer so much and you ask why. Yet you can see many people who are very wicked, very mean, very cruel, unjustly enjoying very special treatment of society. And you revolt against this kind of thing.

In the Buddhist circle they used to explain this kind of injustice by the teaching of cause and effect, in the context of "three times." "Three times" means the past, present, and future. And they quoted this sentence: "If you want to know what kind of goal you have pursued in the past life, just look at yourself in the present life." If in the present life you suffer, it means in the former life you have done a lot of wicked things, cruel things. So if you suffer during this life, it's because you were doing bad things in the former life. Even if in this life you are trying to do good, you still have to suffer because in a past life you have done bad things. If the other person is doing cruel things but is still enjoying his situation, his special treatment, it's because in a former time in his past life he had done good things. That is why he enjoys the fruit of his good karma right now. To know the quality of your life in the future, you just

look at the action you are doing in this life. If you are doing good things and if you are not happy yet, be sure that you will be happy in the future.

That is the way they explain in the Buddhist circle, in order to appease a little bit your tendency to revolt against injustice. Injustice, you can see it—a small nation occupied by a big nation for one thousand years; a nation destroyed by another nation with napalm, with defoliants. Millions of people die during a war. Think of the former Yugoslavia—a thousand people liquidated in the name of ethnic purification. The whole world community just stood by and allowed it to continue and continue and continue and continue. You want to revolt. You feel oppressed, you feel you have been the victim of injustice. You want to repair that and you think of military means, political means, because you think that only political means and military means can repair injustice. By trying to repair the situation you may cause a lot of injustice at the same time. *Giai oan* is a Vietnamese term, "to undo injustice." *Giai* means "to untie." Injustice is like a rope binding you tightly and you suffer, and you want to remove that rope, and you naturally think of military means, sheer violence. You want political means to repair injustice. According to the Buddhist practice, the only way to undo the injustice is to enlarge your heart. Because only compassion, only loving kindness, only understanding, can answer to ignorance, can answer violence, can answer injustice, can answer cruelty.

A child, a charming little boy, catches a butterfly, and he takes the two wings of the butterfly by four fingers and he just tears like that—and the butterfly dies. The little boy laughs with joy. The little boy does not know that by doing that, he is destroying life. One day I saw a little boy doing like that, I told him, "My dear one, do you know that the butterfly has a sister, a mother? Tonight if the butterfly does not fly home, his parents will be very upset, you know that? Don't you know that you are doing a very terrible thing to a butterfly?" And the child understood. From that moment on, he no longer caught butterflies. A few days later, when it was raining, he was collecting snails on the path and putting them back in the bushes, being afraid that if we step on the snails, the snails would not be able to go back to their fathers, their mothers, in the evening. "Lord, forgive him for what he is doing, because he does not know what he is doing." People are cruel, people are doing incredible things to other people because they are just ignorant. They don't know that what they are doing makes themselves suffer, not only the others suffer. They are acting in the name of the future, of happiness—happiness of humankind, happiness of the nations.

You embrace an ideology, a superb, superb ideology, and you want all your friends, all people in your country to unite, to realize the golden world, the utopia, because you are motivated by the desire to make this world beautiful, perfect, with happiness for all people. You are ready to embrace that superb ideology for the sake of your own nation, for the sake of the world community, and you believe that this is the only way for humankind, because that ideology is the cream of human intelligence. You do it out of goodwill. You kill, you exile, you lock them into psychiatric hospitals, you liquidate them, you bury them collectively, by hundreds of people, because of your love of humanity, because of your aspiration for a better future for humanity. "Lord, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."

Only when you practice understanding do compassion and loving kindness arise. Only when the nectar of compassion is born in your heart do you begin to stop suffering. There is no other way to undo injustice, except by the practice of deep looking in order to forgive, in order to accept. If your heart is small, it means that you have not practiced, you have not been able to see things. When you see that he, she, the other person, because of ignorance, has done that to you and your beloved one, you no longer blame.

[Bell]

Of course we have suffered, all of us. Not only the Bosnians, but also the Serbs. Not only the Palestinians, but also the Israelis. Both of us have suffered. But they continue to bear hatred, anger toward each other. They think that the only way to undo the injustice is to use political and military means, and they ask our friends to come and help us with these means—political

and military forces. We don't know that the way out is love, is compassion. Love and compassion, how could they be possible if we don't open our heart, if we don't open our eyes in order to see that just because we are ignorant we are making each other suffer? Where is the world community? Are you there in order to help us to understand each other? To help us produce the nectar of compassion in our heart? Or are you there in order to support one side against the other and to egg us on to continue the fighting? The interest is not the interest of one side, one nation, one party. The interest is the interest of both, because we inter-are.

In Vietnam we say, "The father eats a lot of salt and it is the son who has to drink a lot of water." What the father does, the son has to bear. We have to inherit the fruit of the actions of our fathers. Why? Is that injustice? Because we are caught in the idea of self. My father did that, not me, why do I have to bear the retribution? But in the light of non-self, you are your father, you are the continuation of your father. If you are a young person and if you suffer, you should learn that you suffer for the sake of your father, your ancestors, and also your society. You have to learn in order to look, and when you say, "I suffer," it's okay: there should be someone who suffers for the sake of his father, for his grandfather, his countrymen. "I suffer, because I love. I suffer for all of them, because they did not know—that is why they have produced a lot of suffering. Now I suffer in order to redeem that kind of wrong doing." Suddenly you have enough courage in order to continue and to forbear the difficulties. Suddenly your heart opens and suffering is no longer unbearable for you because love is in you.

You know, what you do can make your father or your mother suffer. What you do can make your great-grandchild suffer in the future. That is why mindfulness helps us to stop causing suffering to the people we love and to ourselves. A child who at two years old gets a terrible sickness—who is responsible? You cannot say, "Dear little child, you suffer like that because in your former life you have done a terrible thing." You cannot say that. Who did the terrible thing so that the child has to suffer today? All of us—that is non-self. We belong to the same reality. There is a stream of life.

If you continue to sit there and to blame and to hate your parents, that means you have not practiced looking deeply. The better way is to sit down with your parents, to reconsider the situation, to look deeply in order to see how the suffering has come into being and how we can end the *samsara* and the vicious circle of suffering for our sake and for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Understanding opens the door of the heart. Suddenly we are able to accept each other because our heart has grown large thanks to the practice of looking deeply.

Transcending Injustice: The Tale of Quan Am Thi Kinh

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 28, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends.

Today is the twenty-eighth of July, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet and we are going to speak English.

There was a little girl whose name was Kinh, who was born in North Vietnam a long, long time ago. Her parents would have preferred a boy, but a girl was born to them, but they were still happy and they named her Kinh. Kinh means "respect, reverence." That is a very good name. You respect people, you respect animals, you respect life including the plants and the minerals. Reverence. Reverence for life, for what is there inside of you and around you. Kinh was a very beautiful child. As a little girl she was already very beautiful, like a flower. Kinh used to go the Buddhist temple in the village with her mother to offer lotus flowers to the Buddha and to listen to the Dharma talks given by the high monk. She loved the Dharma.

There was a very deep intention in her to become something like a monk, because she saw the monks living their lives very happily and helping so many people. She wished that she could become a monk, because practicing, living in the temple—everything—seemed to be very beautiful and calm. She loved the manner of the monks, going back and forth with gentleness, touching everything with reverence. She just loved the Dharma, even though she was very small. She inquired about the possibility of becoming a monk, and they said no, not for girls. Because Buddhism had just been introduced into Vietnam, there were only monasteries for monks; perhaps there were one or two temples for nuns, but they were very rare. In that time, there was no airplane, there was no bus, so she could not imagine that she could travel far. She was not happy at the idea that she could never become a monk because she was a girl. A kind of frustration was in her—she believed that as a girl one could also practice like a monk, living the Dharma happily like a monk.

She grew up into a beautiful girl and her parents wanted to marry her to someone in the neighborhood. In olden times, weddings were arranged by parents, and you had to obey them because they had their wisdom, they knew who was good for you. The deepest desire of parents was to see their daughter be wedded to a young man with a bright future. One morning they received a letter from the parents of a young man, asking whether they can marry her to their son. The young man's name was Sung Tin—"scholar of goodness," "student of goodness." I don't know how good he was, how bright a human he was, but it seemed that he was born into a family of outstanding tradition, a noble family. He seemed to have a bright future, because he was a good student and he might pass the examination and become a high official in the government. The dream of all students in the past was to pass the high exam and be selected by the king to be a minister, a chief of province, and so on.

Kinh had to obey them to become the wife of Sung Tin, although her love, her deepest desire, was to become a nun. There was no way at all; it was not like in our time. In our time, if a young lady wants to become a nun, she might pick up the telephone and inquire about the existence of nunneries. But in that time Kinh did not have any opportunity to do so. So she buried her desire deep inside and had to obey her parents and be wedded to that young man, Sung Tin. Of course the young wife had to support her husband in his studies. Nourishing the husband, supporting the husband so that the husband can succeed in his studies was the main task of a young wife of that time.

The family of Sung Tin was rich, so Kinh did not have to work very hard to support her husband. There were, however, many young wives who had to sell rice in a market or carry rice in the heat of the summertime in order to earn enough money to support their husbands to continue their studies. This was not the case of Kinh because her in-law family was very rich. So she only took care of the housework, cleaned, cooked, sewed his clothes, and so on. Kinh

was trained very thoroughly as a housekeeper by her parents. One day while she was mending some cloth, her husband Sung Tin was studying beside her and fell asleep. Students want to study as much as possible, they want to stuff in as many books and as much knowledge as possible. So he was trying to do the same thing. He studied day and night, and that day, reading a book close to his wife, he fell asleep.

When Kinh looked at Sung Tin, she saw that a few moustache hairs were not cut evenly. So out of her love and care she used a pair of scissors, trying to trim those three or four hairs. But suddenly her husband woke up. And in that kind of state of being, he thought that she was trying to kill him! So he shouted, he screamed. He screamed. I don't know how deep their love was, how much they understood each other, but this is what happened. So his parents came and asked, "Why are you screaming like that?" He said, "Well, I was dozing. When I woke up, I saw her using a pair of scissors like that. So I don't know." His parents said, "It does happen that wives who are not faithful may kill their husband, because it's in their mind to have other desires, other men. So we don't want you any more as a daughter-in-law. We'd like to send you back to your home." Kinh tried to explain, but the parents did not want to accept.

When I practiced looking deeply into this, I saw that the cause of her being dismissed as a daughter-in-law was not suspicion, but jealousy. Since the time the young man married he spent all of his time with his wife, and the parents felt that they had lost their son. This new woman who came to their home monopolized entirely their son so they acted on this kind of jealousy without even knowing it. So they wrote a letter to her parents and asked them to come and take back their daughter. Imagine how great was the suffering undergone by that family. To them their daughter was perfect, their daughter was very true, very faithful. It was a kind of injustice. And that was the first injustice that Kinh had to suffer, to bear, to accept. So they brought her home. Her parents believed her that she did not have the intention to kill her husband. It was just a misfortune, and the three of them suffered.

[Bell]

But Kinh had learned something from the conjugal life. She saw that people are full of wrong perceptions. Even in that wealthy family, they made each other suffer very much. The love that she felt in that family was not enough to make her happy, to make her bloom like a flower. That kind of love, that kind of life, did not satisfy her deepest need. So the idea of becoming a nun suddenly re-emerged. She spent many nights thinking of how to become a monk in order to practice in a Buddhist temple, so that she would be able to embrace the Dharma entirely and devote her life to the practice of the Dharma.

One night she decided that she would disguise herself as a young man and try to be accepted by a monastery. She did not think that she should go to a temple close to her family, because people would recognize her and her parents would not allow her to go. She decided to go far away because there were temples everywhere. She had to walk something like one hundred miles in order to go so far that even her parents would not know where she was. And she did not tell her friends that she wanted to become a monk. Because if she did, her parents would go looking for her in the temples and would very soon discover her. She kept her desire very secret.

One day she just disappeared with some of her belongings and left behind a letter that said, "Dear Mother, dear Father, I have something I love very much I want to accomplish. So please forgive me for not being able to be home to take care of you, because this desire in me is so big." You know that desire was *bodhicitta*—the desire to practice the Dharma and to bring happiness to many people, because people suffer so much everywhere and are caught up in their wrong perceptions; they do injustices to each other every day. She didn't want to repeat that kind of life again, she wanted to become a monk. So after having walked more than one hundred miles, she found a temple—a temple named Phap Van, Dharma Cloud, not very far from Hanoi.

When she came to the temple disguised as a young man, as a student, she asked to see the abbot. She attended the Dharma talk and was so moved that she waited until the people all went home, approached the monk, and asked to be ordained as a novice monk. The monk asked her to sit down and he said, "Young man, why do you want to become a monk?" And she said, "Dear teacher, I have seen that everything is impermanent, that nothing can last forever. Everything is like a dream, everything is like the flash of lightning. When I looked at a cloud in the sky, first I saw the cloud having the form of a dog, and in no time at all, the form of dog is transformed. I saw the cloud now in the form of a shirt. Everyone is trying to get fame and profit and money in the world and they don't seem to be really happy. I want to have true happiness, and I believe that only in the Dharma could I find peace and happiness." After having said that, she stayed quiet and the monk congratulated her, "Young man, you have understood the teaching of impermanence and I hope you succeed in the practice as a monk." So he allowed her to stay in the temple, and three months later she was ordained as a novice monk.

Her Dharma name was Kinh Tam. He retained the name Kinh, "reverence," and he added the name Tam is "the heart." Reverence of the Heart or The Heart of Reverence. My students all bear the Dharma name "heart." "Source of the heart," "Door of the heart," everything is "of the heart." So they share some of the new novice's name.

Kinh Tam practiced very well, very diligently. She was very intelligent. She studied, she learned the sutras very quickly and she enjoyed very much the life of a young monk. Her teacher loved her very much and he always believed that this was a young man. The young novice was very handsome. Although she was disguised as a young man, although she did not wear anything—gold or perfume and things like that—she was still very handsome as a young "monk," and that drew a danger to her. Because down in the village there was the daughter of the wealthiest family, who would come to the temple every fortnight to offer incense, flowers, and so on, with her mother. The first time she saw the young monk, she fell in love with him right away.

I don't think that it was because of his face; his face was beautiful, yes. But there was something more than the appearance of a young man. The young monk practiced mindfulness very well—we have to call her "he"—he practiced walking mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing everything mindfully. And that is why he looked very beautiful. Because people in society are not that beautiful; they are always in a hurry, they only run, they only do things quickly, they don't have that freedom, that relaxation, that kind of peace that is expressed through the way you look, through the way you do things, through the way you sit down, through the way you walk. And that is why the young lady fell in love with the young monk right away.

Her name is Mau. Mau means "color." What color, I don't know. I don't blame her. I don't blame her because the monk was very beautiful. You can call him "handsome," but he was more than handsome, he was beautiful because he had peace within him. So if there is a lady who falls in love with a monk, that is not something extraordinary, that does happen. I remember there was one time a man who came to Plum Village and who asked Sister Jina, "You are such a beautiful lady, why have you become a nun? That is a pity, that is a loss." After some silence Sister Jina said, "If you see me as beautiful, it is because I have become a nun. If I had not become a nun, I would not be as agreeable, as pleasant as you may see."

That is true, when you become a monk or a nun, you become much more beautiful. You adorn yourself with peace, with mindfulness, with the practice of the Dharma, and that is why you emanate that kind of beauty that is rare in society. So I really don't blame Mau at all. If I was Mau, I would fall in love with the young novice also. She tried to talk to him, tried to find opportunities to be alone with the young monk, Kinh Tam. But Kinh Tam always seemed to avoid her; it was very frustrating. Sometimes she tried to guess in advance the way the young monk would go, and run to wait for him, but when he saw her, he would turn and go into

another direction. She tried several times to express her love to the young monk, but he was very determined to continue practicing as a monk.

She was very frustrated. She did not know how to transform her love. She did not understand the Dharma. She only practiced Buddhism in a very shallow way—going to the temple, offering a lot of bananas, sweet rice, and flowers and doing a lot of prostrations. She did not know how to practice in order to take care of her desire, her anger, and so on. When you go to the temple, you have to learn the Dharma. You have to change yourself in the practice of the Dharma and not do like Mau. Her love for him was so deep, and she was deeply frustrated. That is why, one day, when her parents were not home, she called into her room the young man who worked as a servant, an attendant, in the family. He took care of the garden and the housework, and during the night—I think it was a full moon night—she could not bear her love any more. So she called him in and she allowed him to have sexual intercourse with her, and during the act she imagined the young man as the young novice. It was stated in the story very clearly that in that state of being half awake, she imagined the young man as the beautiful novice.

The accident happened. And a few months later she felt that she was pregnant. She tried to hide it from her father and mother, but it became more and more apparent. The parents asked, "Why are you like that my daughter? You don't want to eat anything, you refuse eating rice, you eat only very sour things." She said, "No, I am perfectly all right, my parents. I just don't feel well enough in my body, that's all. Maybe my blood needs purification." But in a few days, she was summoned by the council of the village together with her parents, because in the village they had noticed that the young lady without a husband had become pregnant. They set up a kind of court and asked her to tell them with whom she had slept in order to become pregnant like that.

So she thought for a long time: "The young man was already chased away. Even if I tell the truth, people wouldn't believe me. The head of the village said that I should tell them the truth, and if I name the young man, I will have the opportunity to have him as an official husband. Why don't I tell them that the man who slept with me is the novice Kinh Tam practicing in the Phap Van temple?" So she said, "Respected elders, I used to go to the temple and I fell in love with the young novice Kinh Tam over there. And both of us could not bear our love not being fulfilled, that is why we have made the mistake. So please forgive us."

The head of the village sent someone to summon the family of the temple: the monk, the novice, and a few other people from the temple. When Kinh Tam arrived, she was told that Mau had declared that "he" had slept with her and made her pregnant, and the head of council said, "Kinh Tam, young novice, you have already decided to become a monk, why didn't you practice the precepts? You have slept with a young woman in the village. What do you have to say?" And the young monk said, "No, I practiced my precept. I never slept with anyone in the village. Please reconsider. This is injustice. Please be understanding. Please have compassion. I have not done anything like that." But when the head of the village turned toward Mau, she continued to confirm that it was the young monk who had slept with her and caused her to be pregnant. And the young novice firmly denied this. "No, as a young monk I practice deeply my precepts. I have never done that. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are witness to my honesty."

Finally, they had to use whips. "You have to tell the truth, otherwise you will be beaten with a whip thirty times. You have to confess that you have slept with Mau." Then they tied her up to a pillar and they ordered her to be beaten thirty times by the whip. That is the kind of punishment used in the past. The whipping was very, very strong and the blood began to penetrate, to come out into the cloth of the young monk. But "he" did not give in. "He" said, "No, I am innocent, please reconsider." And after Mau saw that, she said, "Please, thirty lashes are enough." She felt pity for the young novice. Because she was the daughter of a wealthy family, her request had some weight. So they allowed the novice to go home. When

they went back to the temple, other people wanted to take care of the young novice but the young novice said, "No I will take care of myself. I can make the bandage, I will take care of the wound on my body," because she did not want others to discover the fact that she was not a young man.

After taking care of the wounds inflicted on her by the whips, she presented herself to her teacher, and her teacher said, "My son, I don't know, I'm not sure. I don't know whether you have done it or not. I really don't know. If you have done it, then I wish you would practice deeply the practice of Beginning Anew every day. And if you have not done it, please also practice forbearance—*shanti-paramita*—and try to find the joy in the practice." That was all of his teaching. And because of that, she was requested by other people in the temple to move into the gate of the temple and stay there, and not to stay together with other monks. You know, every temple has a triple gate, and the tower bell was very close to the triple gate, and now Kinh Tam was ordered to go and live alone in the triple gate so that the population of the village could not blame the sangha, because there was already suspicion.

I don't know whether if I was the teacher of Kinh Tam I would allow her to continue to stay with me in the compound of the sangha. I don't know, because my time is different and that was a very old time and people were still full of prejudices, and so on. And I would have had enough wisdom to know whether my student had done it or not because I always try to practice good communication with my students and with my insight, with my mindfulness, I would know that he has done it or not. Because I am not there to blame my student, I am there only to help him or her. So she would tell me the truth. When the baby was born, Mau did not know what to do. She did not want at all to tell people that this was a child coming from a servant. That would be very bad for the reputation of her noble family. To die was preferable to saying that she has slept with a servant. That was something she could not bear, and her family could not bear. You have made a mistake, you have done something wrong, but you have no courage to admit your wrongness and you blame other people—that is something that happens every day. So finally she brought the baby to the novice. She brought the baby to the triple gate of the temple and said, "Novice, this is your child. Why don't you receive it?" Then she put it on the steps and she went away. When the baby started to cry, the novice said, "Well, now the child is abandoned. If I don't take him, who will take him? I am practicing compassion and understanding. If I don't take him and try to protect him, who will?" So he said, "Leave it to me!" And he picked up the baby.

[Bell]

The baby was hungry and the novice did not have milk. So she took the baby and went into the hamlet and tried to beg for some milk. Every day she had to go to the village and ask for some milk for her baby. There were people who were moved by the act of the young novice, but there were many people who said, "Well, how could he practice as a monk if he does things like this—sleeping with a woman and when the woman gave him the baby, accepting it, and now trying to raise the baby as a father. How can someone practice the Dharma in that way?" The novice felt that people didn't understand her, and yet she continued to practice forbearance because she was able to feel the peace and the joy of living with the Dharma.

If she wanted to get rid of that injustice, it would not be very difficult—just declare to the village council and to her teacher that she is a girl. And a few minutes later she would be free from that kind of blaming, from that kind of suffering. Why hadn't she done it? Because she loved the Dharma so much, she wanted so much to continue as a monk, that is why she did not give up. When you are in love with something very deeply, when you feel so much happiness with that object of your love, then you have the courage to bear all kinds of injustice. So being beaten, being misunderstood, being blamed by many people, she could still go on because she had the pleasure, the happiness, of being a monk, of practicing the Dharma. In our days, there are people who live in the Sangha and who encounter some difficulties and think of leaving the Sangha. They don't have that kind of forbearance. They cannot bear little

injustices inflicted on them because their desire, their happiness is not large enough. Therefore the key is whether you love it a lot, you treasure it a lot, you want it a lot, whether your heart is huge or not. If your heart is small, then you cannot bear injustice inflicted on you. Understanding and love are what help your heart to grow bigger and bigger. That is the practice of the four unmeasurable hearts—loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Because your heart can grow as big as the cosmos; the growth of your heart can never end. If you are like a big river, you can receive any amount of dirt—it will not affect you, and you are able to transform the dirt very easily.

In the Dharma talk in English preceding this one, I used that image offered by the Buddha. If you put an amount of dirt in a small container of water, then that water has to be thrown away, people cannot drink it. But if you throw that amount of dirt into a huge river, people in the city continue to drink from the river, because the river is so immense. There does not have to suffering because of that amount of dirt. Overnight that dirt will be transformed by the water, by the mud within the heart of the river. So if your heart is big as the river, you can receive any amount of injustice and still live with happiness, and you can transform overnight the injustices inflicted on you. If you still suffer, it means that your heart is still not large enough. That is the teaching of forbearance in Buddhism. You don't try to bear, you don't to suppress your suffering. You only practice in order for your heart to expand as big as a river. Then you don't have to bear, you don't have to suffer.

There are ways to make your heart big. That is the practice of looking deeply in order for you to understand. The moment when you understand, your compassion arises. And that compassion will allow you to go on, allow you not to suffer, not to look at other people with the eyes of irritation and hatred. That is the real practice of forbearance—you don't have to suffer. Forbearance in the context of the Buddhist teaching is not to try to swallow the injustice, or to suppress the injustice, but to embrace it entirely with your big heart. So every morning you have to go to your heart, touch it, and ask, "My heart, my darling, have you grown overnight a little bit bigger?" We have to visit our heart every day in order to see whether our heart still continues to grow unlimited, to grow great. "Growing great" is the term used by Buddha while he was teaching about the four unmeasurable minds. Your heart of compassion becomes larger. It grows great all the time, your heart of loving kindness, your heart of joy, your heart of equanimity. OThat is why *paramita* is sometimes translated by the term "[ph: vo que]." [Thây writes on blackboard] It means "the highest point, the limit." [ph: vo que] means "no point all highest or limit." "[ph: Que]" means extreme, like a [ph: Ba kuk], the northernmost or the southernmost tip of the earth called [ph: Ba kuk]—north pole. It is an extreme, this is the limit. But how ur compassion, our loving kindness, our joy, our equanimity knows no limit—that is why these four minds are called "unmeasurable minds" because they always grow and grow, without stopping. They grow into a river, and then they grow into an ocean, and they continue. The more your heart becomes bigger and bigger, the easier you can bear, or accept, injustice without suffering.

A few days after the young monk received the baby and adopted him and tried to nourish him, he was summoned by his teacher: "My child, why have you done that? You have not slept with the lady, it is not your baby, but why have you received it? It does not seem that this is making a good reputation for our Sangha." I do not know whether, if I were the teacher I would do like him, very afraid of my prestige. But Kinh Tam bowed to him and said, "My dear teacher, I have learned in a sutra that if you build a stupa of seven stories, and if you build one thousand of them, the merit would not be as important as the merit of saving the life of a living being. That is why I have accepted this baby and try to bring it up." That is what the young monk told his teacher.

The novice learned to sing lullabies. So in the village they heard sometimes the big bell and the gatha, "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true self. May the sound of this bell penetrate deep into the cosmos . . . ," and so on. And sometimes they could hear,

"Sleep well, sleep well, my baby" These two things mingled with each other. I believe that the novice practiced well, singing the lullaby as well as the gatha, because both of them have the flavor of the Dharma in them.

When the little boy was grown up, Kinh Tam became very sick, and she knew that she would die in a few days. So she wrote a letter to her parents and she wrote down their exact address, and she told the boy that after her passing away, he had to try his best to go back to her original village and present this letter to her mother and father. She also wrote a letter to her teacher. Two letters. After she passed away, the boy did as he had been told. He went to the teacher and submitted the letter of his "father" and also he asked for the permission to depart in order to go to the original village of his "father." After reading the letter, the monk was very surprised so he asked two nuns to come to examine and all the nuns reported that the young novice was not a boy, but a girl. Then everyone was very surprised, and the monk sent a messenger to the head of the village. The head of the village was very surprised, also. So he convened a meeting and sent a delegation to the temple for the verification of the fact. After having verified that, he announced to the whole village the truth and asked the family of Mau, Color, to come and answer their questions.

And Mau's wealthy family had to pay a very heavy kind of tax to the village, and they had to pay all the expenses of the funeral organized by the temple. In the Vietnamese poem written about the story we have the full text of the letter. Kinh Tam requested the forgiveness of her father and mother, saying that she had not told them where she had been because she desired so much to practice as a monk. She said that she practiced like that not only for herself, but for the whole family and for many living beings, and she hoped that they would understand and forgive her, and receive this young man as someone very close to the family although he is only an adopted child. Her parents cried a lot. It had been so many years without hearing anything from their daughter and suddenly this morning they received a letter announcing that she was no longer alive. So they cried a lot, and they set out for the Phap Van temple. They also told the former husband, Mr. Sung Tin, to come along. They spent many days traveling; and when they arrived at the temple, they saw the banner bearing their daughter's name, and a very long procession. All the people in the village came to attend the funeral service. They were so moved, and many people were crying.

If you practice, you have to practice like that. That is the absolutely perfect way to practice. Even if injustices are inflicted on you, you continue to have a lot of energy, you continue the Way. You don't blame anyone for your suffering. Practicing like that is real practice. When her family arrived, they participated in the funeral service and were received as distinguished guests by the temple and the village. After that, the whole village organized a ceremony to transfer all the merits to Kinh Tam and to practice *giai oan*. *Giai oan* means "untie the injustice." And it was said at the end of the story that the Buddha appeared and announced that Kinh Tam had arrived in a state of enlightenment, and she was now acting as one manifested body of Avalokiteshvara. Her name is Quan Am Thi Kinh. She is a Vietnamese Avalokiteshvara and the story is known by everyone. In the temple, many people know the poem by heart and it is the perfect model for the practice of forbearance.

All of us feel at times that we are victims of injustice. We suffer so much injustice, even from the people we love. And we want to repair that injustice, we want to cry out. We want to practice untying the injustice that we have borne for so long in the past. That is why we are always ready to talk to other people about our suffering and the injustice we have suffered. Maybe deep in our heart, we want justice to be done by any kind of means. Maybe we want a military solution. Sometimes you want to use a gun. Sometimes you want to use a stick. Sometimes you want to use an army. As a nation, if you feel that you are a victim of injustice, you are tempted to use a military solution. But if you are not a nation, you are inclined to use other kinds of revenge—using sticks, hiring someone to beat the other person, using a gun, or

you want to manipulate the situation, you want to use political means in order to repair your injustice.

But according to the teaching of the Buddha, you can only repair that injustice in you, you can only transcend it, by transforming it. The only way is to practice the four immeasurable minds—*maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which is compassion; *mudita*, joy; and *upeksha*, equanimity. And in order to cultivate these four qualities, you have to use the practice of looking deeply, namely, calming and looking—*samatha* and *vipasyana*. You do your best to remain calm, to remain concentrated. You do your best to look deeply into the nature of your suffering, and suddenly understanding comes and your heart begins to expand. Suddenly you feel that you have the power to bear that injustice; you can survive with that, you can live with that, and you even can transform it.

The Buddha said that when you are struck by one arrow, you suffer. But if a second arrow comes exactly to the same spot, you suffer not twice, but maybe thirty times more. When you suffer something and you get angry, your suffering will be not only doubled, but thirty times more intense. You amplify your suffering by your ignorance, your anger, your frustration, your hatred. Why do you have to suffer that much? In fact, why do you have to receive the second arrow? With one arrow, and with some understanding and practice, you would not suffer much and you would be able to remove the arrow very soon. But because of our ignorance, our lack of practice, we become angry, we let hatred and despair overcome us—that is why our suffering has become unbearable. This is the teaching of the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya (*Samyutta Nikaya*: 4, 210) about the first arrow and the second arrow. The second arrow is ignorance.

The other day we used the image of a little child tearing apart a butterfly. The little child does not know that doing that is inflicting a lot of injustice and suffering on the little insect. The little child just wants to play. He doesn't know that tearing apart a butterfly like this is making a living being suffer. The little child is doing it out of ignorance. When we tell the little child, "My darling, do you know that tonight the little butterfly cannot go home to his parents? What if you cannot go back tonight to your parents? They would suffer a lot." If you tell a child that, the next time she will not tear a butterfly with her two hands. She will be able to protect life. "Lord, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." People make each other suffer, and they don't know it. They act out of anger or hatred; they don't have happiness within themselves. They are overwhelmed with ignorance, with hatred, with anger, and that is why they have made people around them suffer. And we may be doing the same thing, but we don't know it.

[Bell].

It happens from time to time everywhere that a person will use a gun to kill people in a market place; suddenly in a high school someone with a gun just appears like that and kills three, four, five students without any reason at all. Your daughter, your son, goes to school as usual. And that morning it happens that it is your daughter who was killed by that crazy man. That is a form of injustice. And you might bear a lot of hatred toward that man. But if you look into that man and look deeply, you see that that man is full of craziness, that man is full of ignorance, that man is full of hatred, of alienation. When a man holds a gun and shoots at people like that without reason, there must be a reason. And people like him or like her, they do exist in the world. How could a man become like he is? How was his family, how was his society, how was his education? Did anyone take care of him at all? Of course, if we were there we would try our best to prevent him from continuing to kill other people. We are urged to act right away, put him in a situation where he cannot continue to harm people, even to lock him into a prison cell; we have to do that. But we have to do that with wisdom and compassion. We don't do that with anger and hatred. We don't do it out of the will to punish the man, because the man has been suffering a lot.

The Art of Healing Ourselves

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 30, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good Morning Dear Friends,

Today is the thirtieth of July, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Today is also the full moon day. Tonight I hope that the full moon will be there for all of us. If the sky is clear, I will be happy to invite you to sit with me on the platform of my hut under the moon.

We have been talking to the children about the twenty-first century. We want to prepare ourselves to be ready for the twenty-first century. We have been talking about how to make our home comfortable for the twenty-first century. We talked about a room in which we can practice peace, reconciliation with ourselves, where we can restore ourselves, where we can take refuge. We talked about a local park taken care of by twenty or thirty houses. We discussed how to make that park into a center of peace and joy for children and for adults.

I would like to continue, because it is our duty to practice looking deeply in order to make life more pleasant for ourselves and for those we love. I want to talk about a day of mindfulness—a day for each family and from time to time, for many families at the same time.

In Plum Village we have been doing things that are very exciting. We are preparing the chanting book for the twenty-first century. We have nearly finished it. We will have it printed just two years before the twenty-first century. We have also prepared a book of practice for the young novice of the twenty-first century. We have been preparing a lot and we do it with a lot of joy. So this matter of taking care of the twenty-first century, it has to be the job of everyone because we only have four years before the new century starts. And we have decided to climb the hill of the twenty-first century together in peace, with a lot of happiness.

[Bell]

One of the things we have talked about concerning the preparation for the new century is how to handle our garbage. Because during this twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, a lot of suffering. We have created a lot of war, created a lot of suffering, a lot of discrimination, a lot of death. If we don't know how to take care of that garbage, the twenty-first century will not be pleasant. And we have only four years left to take care of our garbage. How to pile it up, how to transform it into compost, so that the flowers of the twenty-first century would have a chance to bloom? This is a big job and we have to do it together. We have to come together and practice looking deeply concerning how to handle the garbage we have produced. One person cannot do much.

[Bell]

Personally, I want the twenty-first century to be called the century of love. Because we desperately need love. The kind of love that will not produce suffering. There is a Buddha that is supposed to be born to us. His name is Maitreya. Maitri means love. So, Maitreya means Mr. Love. In order to prepare for that Buddha to come, we need time. We need to coordinate our efforts. Several times I have said that the new Buddha may not be in the form of one person. The new Buddha may take the form of a Sangha. The Sangha means community, community of practice. Naturally I myself and all my friends are working hard in order for the Buddha to come in the form of the community, Buddha as a Sangha.

The first element of love is *maitri*, the willingness to bring happiness to the person we love, the people we love, and therefore to ourselves. Because we know that if the other person is happy then we will be happy also. The Buddha said when you wake up in the morning you ask yourself this question, "What can I do today to make my Sangha happy?" This is a good practice. What can I do today to make him happy? What can I do today to make her happy? What can I do today to make them happy? To make my Sangha happy? That is the first question we have to ask in the morning.

I would like to say something about this question. Because I think that to do something may bring happiness, but just to not do something is equally important. If you are able to refrain from doing something you can make many people happy. So the question might be put like this, “What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy?” Because in our daily life we might do things that make our beloved one suffer. Therefore just not to do it is good enough to make them happy. What can I do today to make the Sangha happy? What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy? This is a very good question. You have the willingness to love and to make people happy. You know that you'll be happy if the other people are happy. No one questions your good will—you really want to love, you want to make people happy. So, you want to make it not only a wish but a reality. So you try to do something, or you try to not do something, in order for happiness to be possible.

The day of mindfulness we organize each week in our family may be a very good opportunity for us to learn to do this. A day of mindfulness is like a breathing room in our home. It's something that a civilized family should practice. In the old time, people didn't work on Sunday—I hope they still practice that. Sunday is not the day for you to work. In Plum Village we call Saturday “lazy day.” To be lazy, that's not easy. You have to learn how to do it. On lazy days I used to ask people this question: “Dear friend, are you lazy enough?” To practice a lazy day is not easy, therefore we have to support each other in making it a real lazy day. Because we have the tendency to work hard, to be busy. A day of mindfulness, or maybe half a day of mindfulness, is what we have to do to increase the happiness in our family, in our society.

The question is how to organize that half-day or day of mindfulness so that everyone can enjoy it. It should not be hard practice. Because I don't really like the word “hard” practice or “intensive” practice—I don't know what it means, “intensive practice of meditation.” When I drink a glass of water in mindfulness, I practice mindfulness of drinking, and I get a lot of joy and peace during the time of drinking a glass of water. But can I drink my glass of water intensively? No. It does not mean anything to me. To drink water you just drink it with mindfulness. The more you are mindful, the more the drinking becomes a pleasure. The problem is whether you drink it in mindfulness or not. The problem is not whether you drink it intensively or not intensively. The same thing is true with walking meditation. If you walk with mindfulness, your steps will bring you a lot of joy and peace. If you don't, then there's no joy and peace. It is not a matter of being intensive or not intensive.

So we need the intelligence of everyone in the family to make the day of mindfulness a very pleasant day. And a day of mindfulness, according to me, is a day when we practice what we can do for the happiness of our beloved ones. It is very crucial that everyone in the family, everyone in the community, practices together; otherwise it would be very difficult. Imagine a family of five people. Only one person wants to practice mindfulness. It is possible, but it is extremely difficult. So, if you are in a family where everyone agrees on the practice of a day of mindfulness, you are a very lucky person. And you have to use all your intelligence. You have to tell your father, your mother, your brothers and your sisters, how you would like to organize a day of mindfulness. I repeat, a day of mindfulness a week is something very civilized. Because we know that without peace, without calm, happiness would not be possible.

A day of mindfulness is a time when we practice and enjoy peace. Enjoy calm. Enjoy communication. It is not because you can talk a lot that you can communicate. It is because you are peaceful, calm—you have the capacity to listen deeply to the other person—that you can communicate. Therefore, in the day of mindfulness you don't talk much. You practice listening deeply with your calm, with your peace and everyone is like that. That does not mean that joy will be diminished. In a day of mindfulness, even when people don't talk a lot to each other, they communicate more with each other by many ways. It can be a very joyful and

happy day. I think you will all agree with me that the lazy day each week here is a very nice day. Although we practice silence, this silence is very helpful. It helps communication. It is not oppressive.

What can I do to make the people I love happy? That is our practice in the day of mindfulness. To me, to make another person happy you have to practice being there. To practice being there that is the essence of Buddhist meditation. But perhaps during the week you are not there with the people you love. You are always absent, even if you are eating with them or watching television with them. You are not really there for them. You have not made your presence true and available to the people you love. To me to love means to be there for the person you love. It is very simple, but it is a very deep practice. In Buddhist meditation we learn how to breathe, how to walk, how to smile so that we be there entirely with our true presence, because that is the most precious thing that we can give to the people we love. When you go to your mother and you sit quietly close to her, and you look at her and you say, "Mommy, I am really here for you," you are practicing meditation, because you are truly there with the person you love.

[Bell]

The day of mindfulness therefore must be a day where members of the same family have to be really there for each other. That is the principle. How to do it? I rely on you to tell me. So we need to sit together and discover. The television companies who publicize their products say, "We bring people together." They mean that things like video tapes and television programs bring people together. I don't believe this much because, as I see it, people who spend the day apart from each other and come home very tired don't have time to be with each other. They turn on the television set and just get lost in that. So television does not bring people together.

What then can bring people together? I think a day of mindfulness. They practice being there for each other. This is very important. This is a kind of answer to the suffering of our time—to practice being there for ourselves and for the people we love; it is very important. In a meditation center like Plum Village we should learn methods of producing our true presence for ourselves and for the people we love. Practice mindful breathing. Practice quiet sitting, smiling. Practice walking meditation. Practice drinking a glass of water in mindfulness. Practice eating your lunch in mindfulness. All these are to produce your true presence. It is very important. Because that is the essence of love, to be there, available, for the people you love.

What can I do to make them happy? We're talking about what we can do. But we don't talk about how we can be. To do maybe is less important than to be. To be there, fresh and calm and loving. I think that is the foundation of love. What you can do is just of secondary importance. Therefore, to be there—calm, loving, fresh, is a very important practice. If meditation cannot help you to be there, to be calm, to be fresh for your beloved one, don't practice meditation. It does not help. So practice meditation in such a way that you can be there really, with some calm, some peace, some freshness, and you know that your meditation practice is good meditation, good practice. That is the whole process of learning. If you have succeeded to some extent, you tell your brother and sister how you have done meditation—that you become more quiet, more released from your suffering, more present for your beloved one. I think that my discussion has to be focused on these practical methods.

I trust that you know how to share breakfast together in mindfulness, in joy. I know that there are people in the morning before starting off to work who eat their breakfast like everyone else. But, they don't practice being there for the people who will be also away for the day. And whom they cannot see for many hours, maybe eight or ten hours. Instead of drinking their tea or their coffee mindfully and smiling to that person sitting across the table, they hold a newspaper like this and hide themselves behind the piece of paper. It is not very wise. It's

not very nice. So in a day of mindfulness we won't do things like that. We won't turn our television set on. We turn everything off, except one thing, our presence.

We turn our presence on, and beginning in the morning, when we wake up, we think: "What can I do to make them happy? What should I refrain from doing in order to make them happy?" Please answer these questions in detail, then you will know how to organize a beautiful day of mindfulness. Having breakfast together, that is an art. How to prepare your breakfast and how to sit down and enjoy breakfast together, I need many sessions of Dharma discussions in order to find it out. We would profit a lot from your collective deep looking, your knowledge, your experience about how to organize a breakfast where joy and peace and love can be possible. Give us a Dharma talk, give us a report, give us a Dharma discussion that helps us to learn how to do it. There are those of us who prepare our breakfast while following our in-breath and our out-breath, smiling to the bread, the milk, the muesli, and so on, and who are full of love in the heart. "I am making this breakfast for my Sangha. I am nourishing my Sangha because my Sangha is my body, the Sangha body." Even if the other brothers and sisters don't contribute to making the breakfast, I would not be angry because I am preparing breakfast with love. So there's no jealousy, there's no rancor in my heart. During the time I prepare my breakfast, I am nourished with love. My Sangha is me, my Sangha is my body, therefore I prepare my breakfast with joy.

You may like to make a little bit of preparation beforehand. Tomorrow will be the day of mindfulness. Today you might already enjoy making a few preparations so that tomorrow would be wonderful. Maybe a few flowers for tomorrow, maybe a special tablecloth, maybe a loaf of special bread for tomorrow. You are motivated by the idea, by the desire, to be happy and to make your beloved one happy. Eating breakfast in such a way that happiness and love can be present. Then you may enjoy walking meditation in a park or just in the front yard. Everyone in the family should know how to walk in order to generate peace and joy and togetherness by walking. You don't have to walk very long, you just walk the time you want to walk. And each step like that can bring you a lot of joy and peace and happiness.

If you want to invite a child from another family or a friend to join your day of mindfulness, please do it. Because you are motivated by the desire to make him or her happy with your mindfulness day. Many, many years ago—I think about twenty-five or thirty years ago—I wrote a little book where I proposed a day of mindfulness every week. A day when we have really the opportunity to practice attention, mindfulness, love, and care to ourselves and to the people we love. I think in the twenty-first century, to hold a day of mindfulness a week is a very civilized thing to do. Not only for the Buddhists, but for everyone. They may not call it a "day of mindfulness," but it must be of the same essence: cultivating peace, cultivating togetherness, cultivating the present moment. It is very important for our happiness.

Before the children go out and play, I would like to remind of them of the practice of visiting the Buddha that I have proposed to children in Holland—they love it. And if the adults want to practice, it's okay also. Visiting the Buddha. The Buddha is within yourself, the real Buddha. The Buddha you see in the garden is a Buddha, but made with plaster, it's not a real Buddha. When you bow to that Buddha, if you bow correctly, you touch the Buddha within. A real Buddha is not made of copper or gold or plaster—a real Buddha is made with mindfulness. Mindfulness carries understanding, peace, and love. So bow to the Buddha in such a way that you touch Buddha inside and you know Buddha is not something abstract, it is your mindfulness.

You have proved to be mindful at times. You are very capable of drinking a glass of milk mindfully. One day I was drinking my milk, very slowly and mindfully. I saw the cow as my adopted mother. I feel very happy to have the chance not to eat my mother. I am vegetarian, and I feel very lucky not to be forced to eat the flesh of my adopted mother. Every time I drive from the Upper Hamlet to the Lower Hamlet, looking at the straw, I see milk in it inside, because a mother cow will eat it and it will become milk. So when I look at the milk I

see the straw and when I look at the straw I see milk, I see the water, I see the sky, I see the sunshine, and I practice like that all day. I can see the nature of interbeing in everything, everyone.

This is very wonderful because it reveals to me a wonderful world of interconnection. Trying to look at things like that will reduce all my fear, and discrimination and anger. It is very important, because in Buddhism we speak about liberation from suffering by understanding. The children prove to be able to be compassionate, to be loving, to be calm at times—therefore the Buddha is real inside. There is no doubt. When I make a lotus flower and bow to a child, I say, “A lotus for you, my dear, you who are a Buddha to be.” If you want to be a Buddha, you can be a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who is made of mindfulness. You know how to drink a glass of milk mindfully. You know how to walk mindfully or to breathe mindfully. During the time you do so, you touch Buddhahood in you, the Buddha nature in you.

So it’s very nice to visit the Buddha within from time to time. You might like to sit down quietly and breathe in and out for a few minutes to calm yourself, and then you ask, “Little Buddha, my little Buddha, are you there?” Ask very deeply, ask the question very deeply and quietly, “My little Buddha, are you there?” In the beginning you might not hear the answer. There is an answer always, but because you are not calm enough, you don’t hear the answer. “Anyone there? Little Buddha, are you there?” Then the second time you begin to hear the voice of your little Buddha answering you, “Yes, my dear, of course I am always there for you.” When you hear that you smile, “I know. Little Buddha, you are my calm. I know you are always there and I need you, to be calm, from time to time. From time to time I am not calm enough. I scream, I act as if I do not have the Buddha in me. But because I know you are there, I know that I have the capacity of being calm. Thank you little Buddha, you are my calm. I need you to be there.” And the little Buddha says, “Of course I’ll be there for you all the time. Just come and visit anytime you need.” That is the practice of touching the Buddha inside. It’s a very important practice. Not only for children, for all of us.

I love to sit close to children because of their freshness. Every time I hold the hand of a child and practice walking meditation, I always profit from the freshness of him or her. I might offer him or her my stability, but I always profit from their freshness. Holding the hand of a child in mindfulness, offering him some stability, offering her some stability, and receiving a lot of freshness—this is what I love to do. You say, “Dear little Buddha, you are my freshness. Thank you for being there.” You have confidence because you have been able to be fresh, many times. If you touch the Buddha, the freshness in you continues to grow. The adults, they also practiced like that. “Dear little Buddha, you are my tenderness.” Tenderness is what all of us need and children prove to be tender, many times.

“Dear little Buddha, you are my mindfulness,” that is true. Because a Buddha is someone that is made of an energy called mindfulness. To be mindful means to be aware of what is going on, and this is only possible when you are really there. If you are really there one hundred percent, you will be aware of what is going on. This is a very crucial practice.

“Dear Buddha, you are my understanding.” True, Buddha is the power of understanding. Because if you are there, you are very alert. You know everything that is going on, that is why you understand things and people very easily. So, “Little Buddha, you are my understanding. I need you very much because I know that understanding is the base of love.” If you don’t understand someone, you cannot love him or her. That is why understanding is so crucial.

“Dear little Buddha, you are my love. You are the capacity of loving.” Children, of course, have the capacity to love. If they touch that capacity every day, their love will grow, their capacity of loving will grow, and they are on the way of realizing fully the Buddha within.

So you practice sitting there and you touch these qualities of the Buddha in you. You touch the real Buddha, not the Buddha made of plaster or copper or even emerald. For the practitioner, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not someone outside in the sky, on a mountain.

Buddha is alive, that is a living Buddha that is in us. Tell me of a person who does not possess the nature of Buddha within him or her. No. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most important message of all the sutras is that everyone has the capacity of being a Buddha. The capacity of loving, understanding, and being enlightened. That is the most important message of all sutras.

So this is a very deep practice. You may spend only three or four minutes on this practice. You may like to put your fingers on your heart and you practice visiting the Buddha inside. The Buddha is in your heart, also everywhere in your body, not only in your heart. In your stomach, also. Sometimes you feel that fear is in your stomach, but you should know that the Buddha is in your stomach at the same time. It is up to you to choose.

After a few minutes of practice like that, you practice alone, or together with a few friends. You say, “Dear Buddha, it is very comfortable to know that you are there.” The Buddha always says, “Of course I am always there for you. But please visit more often.” Because every time you visit the Buddha, the Buddha in you profits. The Buddha in you will have more space and air to breathe. Because during the day you may have suffered a lot and you throw into yourself anger, hatred, frustration, suffering. So you deprive the Buddha of fresh air to breathe inside. So your little Buddha may be suffocating a little bit inside. But every time you practice touching the Buddha, you bring in a lot of space, of air. The Buddha within you has a chance to grow. It is very important. Sitting meditation, that is for what? Walking meditation, that is for what? That is to give to the Buddha inside a chance to grow.

“Dear little Buddha, I need you very much,” and the little Buddha in you will say, “Dear one, I also need you very much. Please come and visit more often.” This practice is called recollection of the Buddha and is taught in every school of Buddhism. You touch the Buddha, you touch all the qualities of the Buddha, and you know that the Buddha is absolutely real—not as an idea, not as a notion, but as a reality. Our task, our life, our practice, is to nourish the Buddha and give ourselves and the people we love a chance.

Please write down the practice in short, complete sentences to make it available for other children who are not sitting today in this Dharma hall, so that they can practice with you also.

The children should stand up and bow

[Bell—Children leave Dharma hall].

On the sixteenth of this month I started our summer opening with a Dharma talk where I said that it’s very important to allow our body and our minds to rest. Our body may still carry a lot of wounds inside, and our consciousness also, it may carry a lot of wounds inside. They need healing. The basic condition for all healing is to be able to rest, but we don’t have the capacity to rest. We have the habit of running, of doing things. That is why to meditate is first of all to learn how to rest, to give your body and your mind a chance to rest and to heal themselves. It seems to be a very simple thing, but we need training to be able to do that.

I said that when an animal living in the forest is wounded, it always tries to look for a quiet place to lay down for many days and allow the wound to heal. During these days the animal does not think about eating or anything else. That is the practice of all animals in the forest every time they get wounded by another animal or by other kinds of things, including disease. That wisdom we have to learn. There are wounds within our body. We may have diseases, we may even have cancer or other difficulties that we think to be incurable. We may have blocks of suffering in our consciousness. We may have despair, fear, and confusion, but we know that our body has the capacity of healing itself if we allow it a chance to rest. This is not only true for our body but also for our soul.

Our consciousness knows and has the capacity of healing itself—only if we allow it the chance, that is, to allow it to rest, to authorize it to rest. When we cut our finger we are not so afraid, we know that our body can heal itself. So we just clean the wound, protect it from the dirt, and the battle is from inside and in just twenty-four hours we can heal it. Our body knows how to create antibodies to protect itself. We have to believe in our body. We have to

allow our body a chance to rest. Many difficult diseases may be healed just by our capacity of resting. This we have to learn. In the practice of Buddhism there are many things like that to learn. The sutra on mindful breathing, for instance, is more than enough for you to heal yourself. If you know how to practice exercises brought to you by the Buddha, you know how to do it, to enjoy doing that, you give your body a chance to heal and also your consciousness. You have had the experience of utmost suffering—something happened to you and you did not believe that you could survive that. How could you survive such bad news, pain? And yet, you have survived. You have gone through that period and you've proved to be able to survive that kind of suffering. It means your consciousness knows the way to survive. You say, "Time heals." But time alone cannot heal your suffering. It is not because you are acquainted with the suffering that you are healed. No. It is because of the fact that your consciousness knows the way to heal itself. You have to trust it because in your consciousness there is the Buddha, there is a seat of love, of understanding. If you allow them to manifest, then your consciousness will be able to heal itself.

Talking to a therapist, talking to a teacher, talking to Dharma brothers and sisters, allows these wholesome energies to be touched, to give them a chance to become more apparent. They will take care of the healing. Sometimes we speak about a "talking cure," but the talking cannot cure. The talking—the most it can do—is to allow yourself to have confidence in your own ability to heal yourself. So it's very important that during that time we spend with a Sangha, a Dharma teacher, we have to learn the techniques of allowing our body and our soul to rest. The heart of the Buddhist practice is to stop—to stop running, to stop preventing our body and our soul from resting.

Many people believe that they need to go for holidays. They struggle, they do everything in order to have these holidays. But during these holidays do they really rest? They are much more tired after the holidays. So everyone has to learn the art of resting, of restoring. Your Dharma teachers, your Dharma brothers and sisters, they know how to practice resting and healing. When you practice fasting for instance, you allow your stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, to rest. You are not afraid of fasting, because you know that there is a reservoir, a reserve, of nutrition in your body. You can go on a fast of two or three weeks without eating and not lose your strength. Those of us who have tried the practice of cleaning our digestive system, we know that. We just drink water. We just rest.

We continue to enjoy our sitting meditation, walking meditation. We don't feel that we lose any energy at all. Our bowels, given time to rest for ten days or two weeks, can heal themselves. We have to believe in such things because we have practiced it and other people have practiced it—it proved to be the truth. Healing is possible only on the days of resting.

Now how about our consciousness, our mind? What kind of practice should you do, or what kind of non-practice should you do in order for your soul and your consciousness to be able to rest? We should not lose our time in getting ideas, even very wonderful ideas, about enlightenment, nirvana, Buddhahood, or things like that. We should get to the real thing, to the bones of the practice. How to start? With *samatha*. Samatha is just stopping. You stand in front of a young tree. You look at the young tree. You stand in front of the tree in such a way that you can stop. You breathe in and out in such a way that you can stop completely running in your mind and in your body.

Last year when we visited China, we saw on crossroads the sign, "stop." And the Chinese word, "stop," is exactly the word that the Chinese people use to translate the word "samatha." One day I stood in front of a sign like this and I practiced breathing and smiling to it. And I completely stopped. It was like standing in front of the Buddha who made the sign to tell you to stop. You are breathing, you are standing there, but you have stopped completely. It is a wonderful thing to be stopped. With stopping like that, calm becomes something possible. Peace becomes something possible and of course healing. As long as you continue to run—running to look for something or running to escape something—it is still running. You have

not stopped, you have no peace. So learning how to stop is extremely important. Because stopping, being calm, being peaceful, is the precondition for deep looking, which is *vipasyana*. Vipasyana is insight practice, contemplation, looking deeply. Meditation is made of stopping, calming and looking deeply. Stopping helps you to rest, to calm, to have peace, to provide the basic condition for healing. Then looking is something you can do easily once you have stopped. Looking into the nature of your illness, looking into the nature of your pain, you begin to have the insight, you begin to understand. That understanding relieves you from the pain completely. That is called salvation by knowledge. We don't speak about salvation by grace in Buddhism. We speak about salvation by knowledge, by understanding, *prajña*. *Prajñāparamita* means the kind of understanding that carries you to the other shore, the other shore of no-suffering.

[Bell]

One of the deepest insights that you may try to obtain is the insight on no-self. But no-self is not a theory, a doctrine, a philosophy. No-self is only the insight that has to be touched directly with your practice. As practitioners we should not talk about no-self in such a way that it will have nothing to do with our daily life. I have recommended that all friends who come here to Plum Village during this summer learn and practice the practice of Earth-touching. Touching the Earth is one of the many practices we do in Plum Village in order to touch the nature of our non-self. It is very healing. It heals body and mind. We should practice it every day.

You hold your hands like this [palms together in front of chest] and stand in front of something like a tree, or the blue sky, or a dandelion, or the statue of the Buddha, anything—because everything has the Buddha inside, has the ultimate dimension inside—to bow to anything is fine, to the moon, to the morning star. You produce your true presence, and be there with one hundred percent of yourself. Then you bow down and you touch the earth. Touch the earth with your feet, with your arms, with your forehead. Touch deeply, don't do it halfway. Because this is an act of surrender. Surrender what and surrender to what? This is the act of surrendering the self, the idea of self. Because you think that you are a separate entity, that is the basic cause for your suffering. When you touch the earth deeply—the earth may be your mother, your father, your ground of being, yourself—you surrender the idea that you are a separate thing. You smile and you open your palms. The act of opening your palm like this and facing inward, it means that I'm nothing. There is nothing. My intelligence—we're very proud of our intelligence. Our talents. Our diplomas. Our position in society. We may be proud of many things we have or we are, but when we are in that position we smile and we know, we know that all these things have been handed down by our ancestors.

If you have a beautiful voice, don't think that you have created that beautiful voice for yourself. It has been transmitted by your ancestors, your parents. If you have the talent of a painter, don't think that you have invented that talent. It has been transmitted to you as a seed. So everything you have thought that you are has come from the cosmos, from your ancestors. So during the first touching of the earth you link yourself with the cosmos. The water in you, the heat in you, the air in you, the soil in you, belong to the water outside, the soil outside. Without the forest how could you be? Without your father and mother how could you be there this moment? Therefore you say, in wisdom, that you are nothing. Everything that you think, you thought that you are, you have received from the cosmos, from parents—including your body. Suddenly non-self arises as an insight. You belong to the stream of life. If you bear hatred toward your father, you think that your life has been ruined by your father, that you don't want to have anything to do with your father. It is out of ignorance that you have thought so. Because if you touch the reality of no-self, you see very clearly that you are your father. You are just a continuation of your father, and your father is a continuation of your grandfather.

We are one in a stream of life. To think that you are a separate entity, that you are a self that can be independent from your father, is a very funny thing. Because your father is inside you, you can never get rid of him. There is no alternative except to reconcile with your father. To reconcile with him means to reconcile with yourself. You have a chance to do so now with the practice. The other person, it might not be your father, he may be your brother or your spouse or anyone. You think that he or she has made you suffer so much, has made your life miserable. There is a tendency in you never to see him again, to hear from him again or from her again. That kind of willingness, that kind of feeling is born from your ignorance of the reality of no-self. Because we are all together. Not only are we together, we are inside each other, we inter-are. So during the first act of Touching the Earth you surrender your idea of self, and suddenly you release a lot of suffering, a lot of anger. You give yourself a chance for compassion and understanding to be born in your heart.

When you make a prostration like that you are not invoking a god to come and save you. To save yourself. But it is really a practice of wisdom. You touch the earth in order to release, to let go of your notion of self and to get insight that you belong to the same stream of life, reality. Suddenly you see that it is possible for you to make peace with that person. Making peace with him means making peace with you. Strange, because my peace depends very much on his peace or her peace. If I devote time, energy, to help him, to help her to suffer less, suddenly I have more peace and more happiness. I do not have the intention to do it for me. But I get all the results.

When you see a small insect in danger, you spend half a minute to rescue the insect. You think that you are doing that for its sake, out of your compassion. But while you do that you cultivate the compassion inside you and happiness becomes yours. What does it mean to be compassionate? To me, to be compassionate means to be able to relate to other living beings. When you are able to relate to other living beings your loneliness, your feeling of being cut off, will disappear. So, compassion is for whom—for these living beings or for you? The answer is, for both. Any word, any thought, any act, born from that insight of no-self, brings healing and reconciliation within you and around you. There are friends who have practiced the Five Prostrations and the Three Prostrations who have reported that the practice is very effective, that those who practice just one hour get a big relief, and continue to cry and cry during the first hour of practice. You already know when you practice like that you do not invoke, call upon a god to help you, but you touch reality. You touch understanding. You touch prajña, that is able to free you. So stopping, resting, is for healing. Looking deeply, touching the insight of no-self is also for healing, for liberation. That is the essence of Buddhist meditation.

Are you interested in realizing your Buddha nature in you, in suffering, in enlightenment? But, that Buddha nature, that suffering, that enlightenment, do they have anything to do with your suffering, your illness? I would not be interested in Buddha nature, enlightenment, awakening, if these have nothing to do with my suffering, my liberation. I only do the practices that can help me to rest, to heal and to liberate myself.

Our practice should be concrete, effective. We should not allow a practice to go on for a long time without bringing us any relief, any transformation. That would not be an intelligent way of practicing. When a farmer, after having used a certain kind of seeds or fertilizer, or methods of agriculture, does not get the results he wants, he would be intelligent enough to change. Meditators have to be like that. If having tried a certain method for some time they do not feel any change, any transformation, they should inquire again. They should learn again from their teachers, their brothers in the Dharma, their sisters in the Dharma, in order to get the right methods. According to the Buddha, the Dharma is effective right away—if you get the right Dharma, like mindful breathing. The moment when you begin breathing in mindfully you already get the result of such a practice. You get the concentration. You get the stopping. What is the use of breathing in if you cannot stop and rest? If you don't feel more

concentrated, why do you have to bother yourself? To suffer because of the practice of breathing in and out, is nonsense. So if you are breathing in and out, and feel concentrated and restful and calm and producing your true presence, you know that the practice is correct and you already enjoy the fruit of the practice.

Walking meditation: Why do we have to walk slowly like that? Why do you have to compose yourself in slowing down like that? It does not look natural. In the beginning, people around the practice center always say, "They don't seem to live in the real world. They like to live in a dream, they walk so slowly." That is a first impression because in the world people always run. They don't know the art of stopping. They don't know the art of living deeply each moment of their life. So when they see a nun or a monk or a lay person walking, looking, smiling like that, they don't feel it's normal. They feel it's abnormal. There's one villager in the New Hamlet, she said she was very, very surprised and shocked when she saw a nun walking slowly who stopped and looked at the garbage. What is the use of looking at the garbage like that for a long time? What is normal and what is abnormal? There are people who have demonstrated that after just a few hours or a few days of staying in Plum Village they begin to like the practice. Because for the first time they know how to stop. To be able to stop is a wonderful thing, because they may have been running for the last 3,000 years.

[Bell]

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, "My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do." Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath, that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive, it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath. So you now understand the two sentences, "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." And a few minutes later, "Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow." That is not an effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha, therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, "Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon," suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer, it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing.

Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So “In/Out” is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then “Deep/Slow” is the next step: “Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it.”

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. “Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me.” This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. “Breathing out, I feel ease in me.” I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

“Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile.” In Plum Village we speak about “mouth yoga,” you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

“Breathing in, I smile,” because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And “breathing out, I release.” I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, “Present moment/Wonderful moment.” To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

“Present moment,” because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. “Wonderful moment,” that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing. Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an “intensive” course of meditation, or a “high” level of meditation, or “intensive” or “high” practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai school of meditation, said, “The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth.” If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

So please, my friends, now it is time for us to enjoy walking together. When you hear the bell, enjoy your in-breath and out-breath. We will take time to enjoy also going to the bathroom. After that we gather around the linden tree. We start walking together. Walking meditation, I consider it to be an act of life-celebrating. To walk together as a Sangha, enjoying every step we make, feeling alive, is really the celebration of life. Don't consider it to be hard or hard practice.

The Five-Fold Steps of Training

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 4th, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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August 4, 1996

Good morning, my friends. Today is the fourth of August, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and we are going to speak English.

In the past three weeks we have been talking with each other about how to run the twenty-first century, how to climb together the hill of the twenty-first century, with joy and peace and happiness. We already talked about a room in our home so that we can practice restoring our self, restoring peace, joy and communication. We also talked about a little park in our neighborhood so that people in the neighborhood may enjoy walking meditation, sitting together in peace, and so on.

We also have talked about how to maintain peace in school. I think we have to ask schoolteachers how we could have more peace and joy and harmony in school. Not only do we have to ask them, but we have to sit down together, teachers and students, in order to decide how we can make the school a beautiful place in which to live. I know of a number of schools where teachers and students practice being quiet during the first three or five minutes and just enjoy breathing in and out; and every time there is disharmony, there is anger, in school, everyone in the school practices sitting down and breathes in and out peacefully.

I don't think that this is a Buddhist practice alone; it is a practice that everyone likes. I am sure that the Catholics like the practice, the Protestants, the Jews, the Muslims also, because everyone values peace and harmony, and everyone knows that to breathe in and out deeply is very good. Doctors, scientists, nurses: they know very well that breathing quietly, slowly and deeply is very good. When a nurse gives you a shot, she may ask you to breathe in and out peacefully, and while you are preoccupied with breathing in and out, she just gives the shot and you don't feel anything at all; you feel fine.

I know of a school teacher whose name is Henry. He teaches mathematics in a high school in Toronto. He is old—I think he has arrived at the age where he can retire; but the principal of the high school and all the other teachers asked him to stay on because people like his teaching so much. The first time he came to Plum Village for the practice of mindfulness, he confessed that the thing he liked best was to go fishing. When other people could not catch a fish, he did not know why, but he continued to catch fish after fish. That is why he liked it so much. But after staying in Plum Village, he decided that killing fish like that is not a nice thing. These beautiful little animals are swimming very happily in the stream, and suddenly you've caught them, and they die. So he decided to abandon fishing as a hobby, and he thought that, when he went home, he would find other kinds of joys. He found a lot of joys.

But he had some difficulties adjusting the way of life he learned at Plum Village to his environment. The day class resumed, he came in the classroom using walking meditation. He never did that before. He opened the door slowly, he entered slowly, he smiled to the students, and he walked slowly to his desk. And then when he stood up and wiped the blackboard, he did it mindfully, slowly, and all the students were very surprised. They thought that he was sick.

So they asked, "Papa, are you sick?" Because they love him; he's a very excellent mathematics teacher. He was very well known in Vietnam as a mathematics teacher. He wrote many good books on mathematics. He used to get angry with his students. Every time a child couldn't give an answer to his question or showed his stupidity, he would get angry. He might just pick up a piece of chalk and throw it directly to the head of the student. That's the way he had done in the past. And when he corrected math exercises, he might get angry; he might

write down, “You are stupid.” But still, the students liked him. There is something in him that makes the students like him, that is why they call him “Papa.”

“Papa, are you sick?” He smiled and said, “No, I am not sick. I am practicing mindfulness.”

“What is mindfulness?” He began to explain, “I am wiping out the things on the blackboard, and I do it slowly, I dwell in the present moment, and I enjoy doing that. I don’t hurry in order to finish it. I just enjoy every step I make. You see, this morning, I came in, I saw you, I’m very happy. So I just stop and look at you and smile, and that makes me very happy.” He spent a few minutes talking about what he had learned in Plum Village. Then he talked with them about the wonders of mindful breathing. He said, “I got a lot of calm when I was in Plum Village, and I want you to try it. Let us sit down; we don’t have any bell here, but I will ask a boy to do like this [clap, clap] and then all of us just sit quietly and enjoy breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling.”

There they went, the boy in the front did like this [clap, clap] and then he and all the rest of the students practiced breathing in and breathing out. He said, “That is excellent. Why don’t we do it for two minutes?” And they did it for two minutes. I think the students listen to him and like to try because they have sympathy with him. He proposed that every fifteen minutes there would be a pause of two minutes. Another boy would take a turn to [clap, clap] and then everyone would stop. He would stop lecturing, and everyone would practice breathing and smiling. They don’t have a bell, so they just stopped by the sound. After a few months of practice like that, both teachers and students realized that they had made a lot of progress in their studies. The class has grown much more peaceful. And they love it, they continue that practice of breathing, smiling, in the beginning of the class and in the middle of the class. So, they could have three times to breathe in and out and enjoy being together.

Professor Henry reported to me in a letter that other classes learned about that, and they adopted the same kind of breathing in, out, and get three breaks during the hour of mathematics. At one point the whole school knew about the practice, and all of them enjoyed it. And that is why, when our Professor Henry asked for retirement, they said, “No, you have to stay on, you have helped us so much.” Now Professor Henry no longer does things like throwing a piece of chalk directly at the head of his students. He told me that one time when he was correcting an exercise, he saw that the student did not understand anything at all. In the past he would write down, “You are stupid,” but this time he did not write down that kind of word. He wrote like this: “My dear, you don’t understand; that’s my fault.” A very deep transformation. And the student who received that correction got moved to tears. “It’s my fault because I did not try my best to help you understand, that is why you don’t understand me.” Henry has come back to Plum Village several times for the practice; he’s coming for this September retreat. He received the Five Wonderful Precepts many years ago, and finally he was asked to become a Dharma teacher. Those of you who will be back here for September, you will meet him.

So I would like to tell the young people who are here today, you can practice peace at school. The other day I asked you to ask your teacher when there is a conflict between you and someone else and you get irritated or angry, and you don’t know what to do to preserve peace and to reconcile. A teacher should know. If she does not know yet, it is her duty to go and learn from someone else. It’s very important; you just ask the question, and you make the wheel begin to turn. Yesterday, a mother told me that her daughter did not speak English, so her daughter had asked her to ask me what she can do every time she gets angry: I recommended that they ask their mother first. So if you ask your mother or your father that question, and the answer is not completely satisfying, then they will try harder and next time they will show you not only the theory, but also the practice.

In our hospitals, we’ve got to have a practice center. I have seen in many big cities, like in Amsterdam, hospitals in which there is a meditation hall, a chapel for the people to sit, to pray, to meditate. This is very important, because the people who are sick need a place to

practice, and when their families come, they also need a place to practice. And when a relative undergoes surgery, members of their families, in order to deal with their worries, should be able to practice, and they need a center like that. There should be brothers and sisters who are trained in the art of meditation in order to serve in these hospitals. I think I am going to write a letter to the monks and nuns in Vietnam, and also to the government, about how to set up a meditation hall in every hospital of the country.

And I think that a meditation hall is needed in each school for students and for teachers. I know teachers sometimes suffer very much because of their students and they need to practice, and students also need to practice; therefore, to have a meditation hall or a chapel in school, that is very important. We have the right to ask for that. You know that all spiritual traditions, they would tell you that you need the same kind of thing. It is neither a Buddhist, nor a Christian, nor a Jewish practice, it is just practice; because all of us need peace, restoration, and so on. So in the twenty-first century I'm confident that people, including yourself, will try your best in order to set up meditation halls in schools and in hospitals.

[Bell]

I would ask also for a meditation hall in each city's central park. The park is something like an island of peace. When the people in the city are suffocated, they don't feel well within their body, in their mind, they would think of the park. If they are in the middle of the week, they cannot get out of town, then the park is the answer. That is why you have to take care of the central park. We have to make all the trees and streams of water clear and beautiful; we need silence in the park. And we need a meditation hall without any symbols, whether Buddhist or Catholic or Jewish. We don't need symbols, because it is for everyone. In Bois de Boulogne, Bois de Vincennes, even in the Tivoli park, we need a meditation hall. Of course, in a park we would need ice cream and hot chocolate, but we must have a meditation hall. By the way, I don't like children to eat too many ice creams in Plum Village. I think a child is entitled to have one only each day, that is the maximum.

And I want a meditation hall in the parliament house, in the city hall, because I have seen people debating in the house of parliament. This is war, this is not peace. They hit each other with poisonous arrows of speech. They are angry, they don't have peace at all, and we don't want people without peace to represent us in parliament. Do you? No. If they don't have peace, they don't have harmony within themselves and with the other members of the parliament, then they make decisions that go against our interests. So if you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a member of the parliament, if you are a member of the city council, or if you are only a householder, you have to do everything in your power to express your view that you want the person who represents you in the Congress and in the city hall to practice peace. Before you vote for him or for her, look; look carefully to see whether in his or her family, there is harmony or not. This is very important; we have to ask. We have the right to ask whether they have harmony with their partner, their children, because they are public people and they have to make everything transparent.

We should be able to know whether they can use loving speech, whether they can master their anger, whether they can practice somehow looking deeply. Because looking deeply is a matter for everyone, especially for those who have to confront very difficult problems concerning the economy, social conflicts, social injustice, and especially war with another country. If you have no right view within you, if you have no insight within you, you have no harmony, understanding, or compassion, you may declare war with another country and you draw the whole country into war. This is very important.

Therefore, there must be a meditation hall in Congress. It would be beautiful if Congressmen or Senators, before starting a session, would sit together breathing in and out, in peace and make the determination to hold the session in peace and harmony and not just fight each other. This is very important. This is peace education, and who can realize that? You claim to be a democracy, so you have to do it. Citizens have to do it. So when we sit for Dharma

discussion, we have to find ways in order to put into practice what we learn from the Five Wonderful Steps of Training.

At the city hall, we need it. Suppose the river that goes through our city is polluted, fish die in that river, who will be responsible? The whole city is responsible; but it is the city council that has to take the matter in hand, so they have to practice looking deeply together at how to save the river. In your home, in your neighborhood, you also organize for looking deeply at your part; and at the city center, city council, they have to practice looking deeply at their part. And we may support them with our insight: "Dear city council, we are in that quarter of the city, we have sat down, we have practiced looking deeply, and this is what we have found out." We can support our city council by the fruit of our practice of looking deeply. The city council, the city hall, has to make decisions based on this insight. If they don't, next time they will not be in the city council. All this is practice, and we practice as a Sangha and not as individuals.

How about places like l'Elysee or the White House, where the president and the government meet to make decisions? How about the military headquarters? I think it is like in our home: there should be a place of peace for the president, for his ministers, to sit in, to breathe together, to calm themselves, before they look into the urgent matters of the nation. And you have the right to request that. You have to speak out your aspiration, after having practiced looking deeply. We don't ask them to follow any particular religion; we just ask them to have a little bit more peace and calm and understanding and harmony within themselves, and we are ready to support them. We will write letters without anger, we will practice talking to them with loving kindness; but we have to do nonviolent action. Loving action has to be taken by us every day.

Decision-making is too important to leave to them alone; you have to take in hand your own fate, and therefore I want the children to hear this, because the twenty-first century is theirs. We adults are very sorry not to have been able to do it during the twentieth century, so we hope that in the twenty-first century you will be able to do that. We are already a little bit enlightened on the matter; we have suffered so much, and we have made you suffer. So we will be supporting you wholeheartedly, and many of us will be climbing with you the hill of the twenty-first century. Please, the people who are less young, also have Dharma discussions on this and make known your insight, your decisions. Now, the young people, when they hear the small bell, they would stand up and bow to the Sangha before they go out to continue their studies and practice.

Dear friends, the Buddhadharma is described as something that you can come and see by yourself. You don't have to believe something through another person, even the clergy, the priest, the mediator. The ultimate dimension of reality is something you can touch, you can see by yourself. And you can do it now, and here; it's not a problem of time. It's not a promise. In the method of Buddhism as I see it, it's very concrete; there's no place to speculate, to suppose, to create an hypothesis. When the Buddha set out to teach and to help people, the first thing he asked people is to look directly into their suffering. Suffering is not an abstract thing; suffering is there, very real. Suffering is one of the basic truths called holy truths, the Noble Truths. Suffering is a holy truth. Why?

In Vietnamese we call it *thanh de*, the holy truth. The word that the Buddha used is *dukkha*; *dukkha* means ill-being, pain, suffering, translated by Chinese *kou*. This word, *kou*, originally in Chinese means bitter, the opposite of sweet. It makes you suffer. And you have to look at it. Why is suffering a holy truth? Because, without suffering, you have no way out. The first thing you have to do is to look, and look deeply, into the nature of your suffering. If you cannot do that, if you try to run away from it, there's no way that you can transform your suffering. That is why suffering is the basic truth and a holy truth. It means we have to learn from our suffering. We have to understand our suffering. If we don't know anything about our suffering, if we cannot learn anything about our suffering, suffering is no longer a holy truth.

Holy or not holy: it depends on our way of handling suffering. And the Buddha said suffering is absolutely necessary for you to find a way out.

A Zen teacher in Vietnam during the 13th century urged his students to practice diligently in order to get out of the world of birth and death. And a student asked him, “Teacher, please show us how to get out of the world of birth and death.” And he said, “You have to look for the world of no birth and no death.” Then the student asked, “But where can we find the world of no birth and no death?” And the teacher said, “You look for it right in the world of birth and death.” It means, out of suffering you will find the way of transcending the suffering. It sounds like something contradictory, but it is the basic Buddhist teaching. So looking into the nature of suffering, you can see many, many things that you need to know.

How that suffering has come to be, that is the second truth. That is about the nature of your suffering. If you already see the nature of your suffering, how it has come to be, you are already on your way to liberation. That is a sentence uttered by the Buddha. Dear friends, if you look into the nature of your suffering, and if you see already what kind of nutriment that has brought about that suffering, you are already on the path of liberation; because everything needs food to grow, to be there, including your suffering. So if you look into your suffering, and if you can see how that has come to be, what kind of food you have fed it so that it is now there as a hard fact, then you are already on the way of liberation, because you have already seen a path of liberation. So the nature of your suffering is the cause of your suffering, the nutriment, the food that you have used in order to feed your suffering.

For instance, if you suffer from a depression now, your depression is dukkha, suffering. So you look into your depression; you need your depression in order to understand your depression. You should not try to run away from it. Go back; confront your depression; embrace it and look deeply into it, and you’ll find out after a few days of practice that in the past few months or few years, you have lived in such a way that made depression possible now. Because your depression cannot come just like that, without any cause. You have got the nutrition, the nutriments, the food that has brought about the depression. What you have eaten, what you have drunk, what you have listened to, what you have viewed, what you have touched, are the kind of nutriments that have made up your depression now. So if you know the nature of your depression, you also know how to stop feeding your depression. And you use other kinds of nutriments for yourself, and a few months later, your depression will be gone.

Suppose the person you love just betrayed you and goes with another person. In the beginning you had hope that he and you would live a long life together, sharing everything, and he or she has made the solemn promise to live together until your hair becomes white, until all your teeth come out. But now, he just abandoned you and followed a young woman. You feel the victim of injustice. You cannot just accept that. You cannot accept the betrayal. You want him, you want her to be faithful.

Your suffering is there, and we advise you to embrace your suffering and look deeply into it and look into how that kind of betrayal has come to be. Who is responsible? What kind of nutriment has made it possible? That is the Buddhist way. You are advised to do it by yourself, if possible with the help of other brothers and sisters in the Dharma. They can do it with you. They can join their mindfulness and the practice of deep looking with you, and help you to discover the nature, the cause of your suffering. If I sit with you, if I practice with you, I may find out that you have been somehow responsible for his act of betrayal.

In the Buddhist teaching, we learn that we have all kinds of seeds within our consciousness. This is our consciousness; it is made up of two levels, at least. The deeper level is called store consciousness. In Buddhist psychology, we speak of consciousness in terms of seeds, *les semences*. The Sanskrit word is *bija*. We learn that in the store consciousness, we have all kinds of seeds within here. Seeds of compassion, mindfulness, tolerance, endurance, peace, joy, loving kindness. We have all the good seeds in us. And the Buddha is also there as a

seed, the seed of Buddhahood, the seed of enlightenment, the seed of concentration, the seed of loving kindness, the seed of mindfulness. It is a fact, and not just a dogma, that you have the Buddha nature in you. You can touch it, you can make a demonstration, you can verify it. Because, according to this practice, mindfulness is the Buddha and loving kindness is the Buddha; understanding is the Buddha; and all of us have the potential of being mindful, of being understanding, of being compassionate.

Children have proved that at times they can be compassionate, mindful, understanding; and adults also. That is the Buddha nature in us. When I ask you to drink your glass of water mindfully, you can do it, you can drink your water mindfully. That means mindfulness is possible for you; you have a seed of mindfulness within your store consciousness. That is why you can practice, and you can be successful in drinking your water mindfully, or in walking mindfully. That is a demonstration that Buddha is in you, because mindfulness is very often described as the energy of a Buddha. A Buddha, a real Buddha, is made with that kind of energy. You have it. You don't need to believe, because you already have direct knowledge about it. It's not exactly a religious belief; this is just an experience.

But in your store consciousness there are other, negative, seeds, like the seed of ignorance, the seed of forgetfulness which is the opposite of mindfulness. Strange, you have the seed of mindfulness and you have the opposite kind of seed. Mara is the equivalent of Satan. If you want to invite the Buddha, you can. If you want to invite Satan to come up, he will be glad to come up. And Buddha and Mara both are of an organic nature. That is the teaching of the Buddha. Buddha and Mara, mindfulness and forgetfulness, both of them are organic substance because they can deteriorate. It's like a flower and garbage. A flower can become the piece of garbage. The piece of garbage, if you know how to do it, will be transformed back into the flower. Mindfulness and forgetfulness play the role of flower and garbage in us, also Buddha and Mara, because we are a living reality; we are not a piece of inert matter in a museum of life. We are a living thing, therefore everything in us is alive, including Buddha and Mara. How wonderful: Buddha is alive in us, not a notion, a concept.

And you have that seed of jealousy in you. You have also the seed of betrayal in you. All of us are able to betray the people we love, not only he, but you. All of us have the seed of loyalty, all of us have the seed of betrayal. If you have not betrayed him, it is because the seed of betrayal in you has not been watered by yourself and by the people who live around you. But if you allow your seed of betrayal to be watered today, tomorrow, by yourself and by the people around you, one day you will betray him, you will betray her. That's something sure.

Now, practice looking deeply to see, what have you done in the past? Have you allowed the seed of betrayal in him to be watered? Who has watered that seed? Did you water that seed yourself? Have you made an effort to remain fresh and loving? If you have not made any effort to remain fresh and pleasant, then you yourself have contributed to the watering of the seed of betrayal. People usually love what is lovable. If you have stopped being lovable, then you help the other way. Have you been very mindful in taking care of him? Have you allowed a situation to happen in which his seed of betrayal has been able to be watered every day? Outside of your mindfulness you have allowed everything to take place, and now you blame him, blame that person for your suffering.

Maybe the suffering, the cause of the suffering comes from yourself, mostly. You just think that you are a victim of injustice, all the suffering that you have now has come from the other person. You blame him or her entirely, and that is injustice on your part because you don't see the truth. You don't know how to handle your suffering, you don't know how to look into that holy truth, suffering, in order to see the real nature of that suffering. The first truth is holy, that is suffering. The second truth is holy also, that is the nature of your suffering. You need mindfulness, you need looking deeply, you need concentration in order to find out that holy truth.

The third truth is that your suffering can be healed, can be transformed. Because it is not a hope, it is a fact that if something has come, it can go away. If you used some kind of nutriment to bring up something, now if you don't want that something to stay, you just cut the nutriment. That is the simple truth, the truth of the absence of suffering. Suffering can be transformed, that is the third holy truth. It's rather comforting. There are people who say Buddhism is a little bit too pessimistic, they always begin with talking about suffering. But that is not pessimism; that is realism, realistic. Because when you peer into the truth of suffering, you see not only the second noble holy truth, but also the third noble truth, which is the possibility of removing the suffering. That's rather good news. You are confident that with some practice, you can end the suffering, you can bring back the state of well-being to you, and to the people around you. Because the first truth is the presence of ill-being, the third truth is the absence of ill-being, which means at the same time the presence of well-being. That's *nirvana*; nirvana is the extinction of suffering and of all the nutriments that have brought suffering to you. Is it too late or not? It's never too late.

[Bell]

Suffering is still going on if you don't practice, or if the other person doesn't practice. So now, if you want to take the initiative, you don't demand anything, you don't require any preconditions, you just begin to stop feeding your suffering. You do it with your faith in the third noble truth, holy truth. "I have to stop feeding my pain, my suffering." And that kind of conviction, that kind of attitude can already bring you a lot of comfort. Then we learn that we have to practice expanding our heart. We should be able to realize many conditions of our happiness and peace. We should have several roots. The other day when I talked to the young people, I told them that if we are mindful, we can be aware of many things, many elements in us and around us that can make us happy. Don't commit yourself to just one idea of happiness.

There was a layman who was asked to give a Dharma talk to monks and nuns because he was so well versed in Buddhism. That happened in the 1930's in Hue. It was to him a very great joy to be able to help the monks and the nuns with his knowledge and understanding of the sutra. I think he was teaching the *Surangama Sutra*. Before coming to the chair to teach, he touched the earth three times before his students. One day, as he was walking up the hill to go to the temple to give his instructions on the *Surangama*, he saw two young boys on the sidewalk enjoying a chess game. He also enjoyed playing, so he wanted to take a few minutes to sit with the little boys, and he enjoyed it so much that he almost forgot that he had to go to the temple and give the Dharma talk. Another friend of his, coming by, saw him like that. He said, "Dear friend, do you know what time it is now? Let us go!" And then he climbed the hill with the other person.

His name is *Tam Minh*, Clarity of the Heart. He had the capacity of being happy with whatever was there around him and in him. To give a Dharma talk to the monks and nuns was a joy, but to sit down with children was also a joy. And not only that; everything around him could make him happy. So we should not commit ourselves to just one thing. We should not ruin our life just because of one thing. A French poet said, "*Un seul être me manque, et tout est dépeuplé*," "Only one person is not there, and I see the whole world as empty." Why? Why behave like that? Because there are many living beings around; why look upon them as nonexistent? How could that being be there if all of us were not there?

So look deeply into the nature of your suffering and practice loving kindness, practice understanding, so that you will not continue to blame. You see your responsibility, you see your way of salvation, of liberation, you are able to touch many wonders of life that are available to you in the here and the now, and suddenly you become the most attractive person, very refreshing, very healing. And everyone will go back to you, because we need you. If you are fresh, happy, peaceful like that, every one of us will need you, will look in your direction, they would follow you, especially those of us who are suffering a lot.

The Five Steps of Training are really the way. The way as presented by our teacher, the Buddha, is the Eightfold Noble Path. Right understanding, right speech, right thinking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. If you practice the Five Steps of Training, you practice the Eightfold Noble Path in a very concrete way. If you put all your being into the practice, if you abide by the practice of mindfulness of consuming, of speaking, of listening, then that is the suppression of the suffering because you don't allow the nutriment for suffering to continue any more.

The other day, we were speaking about the First, the Second, and the Third Steps of Training: to protect life, to practice giving, social justice, and to preserve the integrity of couples and families and protect children from sexual abuse. All these things are right action, right view, right efforts. The moment when you undertake to practice these precepts, trainings, you already begin to get relief. I will offer you an example. There was a Vietnam war veteran who came and participated in a retreat offered by us to about thirty or forty former soldiers, army officers, who had fought in Vietnam, together with twenty or thirty other people, including psychotherapists and family members and so on. I remember we had to practice listening deeply every day and with a lot of patience in order to allow a situation where the veterans can speak out. It's very difficult, because many of them were caught in their own suffering, it's very hard for them to touch their suffering, and to talk about it. Sometimes I had to sit there for half an hour not saying anything, just breathing and smiling, and show our compassion, our readiness to listen. Yet no one could speak a word. And we begin again.

There was a war veteran who tried to join us in walking meditation, but he was so fearful. During the war he had learned that you can get into an ambush very easily, and there were many Vietnamese there. A Buddhist monk can be a guerrilla in disguise. So he was scared to death. He tried to join others for walking meditation, but he kept a very big distance; he walked behind us about thirty meters. He thought that if anything happened, he would have time to run for cover. Instead of staying in the dormitory with us, he camped in the forest and he set traps around his tent. That was our first retreat organized for war veterans in America.

One of the retreatants finally told us his story, that had never been told before. During a battle in Vietnam, most of his friends were killed in an operation, and he saw his companions die. So he got very angry. He wanted to retaliate. He brought out a number of sandwiches, he put explosives inside the sandwiches, he left them on the place where children would play, and he hid himself and watched. He saw children coming. They were very happy to see this kind of sandwich, and ate them. And just ten or fifteen minutes later, they began to scream, and their mothers came out, trying to get them to the hospital, but the American soldier knew that nothing could be done in order to help the children. He had wanted to do so out of his anger and the will to retaliate. Since the time he went back to America, he could not live with that kind of image in his store consciousness. He told us that every time he found himself together with a few children in a room, he had to run out of that room as quickly as possible. He just couldn't bear it, for more than twelve years. His mother encouraged him to deal with the present time, to forget the war, the war was over; but for him, the war was never over. Until he came to the retreat.

I told him, "Yes, I know that you have killed children. You have ambushed them as your way to retaliate. I know you have caused suffering. But I want you to know also that there are many children who are dying around the world, everywhere. Many die just because they need just one medicine pill. Many children die because they need a glass of milk, soy milk. Many step on grenades and bombs that are left over there. If you know how to use your time, now, you can save many of them, even every day. You have the capacity of acting, of living in mindfulness, in compassion, and I know you will be able to save the lives of many children, now. Why don't you make a determination to receive the First Precept of not killing, of protecting life? You receive that precept in the presence of the whole Sangha.

“And you take action right away. You go out and you save children who are dying in the present moment, children even in America. In America there are children who are dying every day because of stupid causes. Children in Southeast Asia, in Africa, everywhere. You know that you have an American passport. You can go almost everywhere, not like the boat people. The boat people, because they don’t have a piece of paper, they are thrown back to the sea and die; but you, you are different. You are an American citizen. You can go where you want, and you can help many children from dying. So make the determination. Receive the First Precept, and act.” And the teaching was already a drop of Dharma nectar. When a drop of Dharma nectar fell into his heart, it opened. He was transformed right away, in that moment. And he made the determination to receive the First Precept and to go out and help.

Suddenly, you become a bodhisattva with a lot of energy within you, and that is exactly the kind of energy that you need to heal. Why remain immobilized, paralyzed in your suffering? Why continue to be the victim of your sorrow? The Five Steps of Training can open up the door for you to transform your life, to transform the lives of living beings on Earth. Because that is the way of loving, protecting, and offering joy and peace. This is not an idea, this is not a dogma, this is not a promise. The Buddhadharmā is something you can come and see by yourself, and touch by yourself. The healing can take place right away, the moment when you embrace the Dharma.

A writer, a woman writer with a lot of talent, she came to me and confessed that she was abused as a little girl and she has carried that kind of suffering within her. She doesn’t feel that she’s a normal person. I helped her to practice. I said, “Sit down and practice looking with me. Are you angry at that person? Don’t you think that he was sick? It was only sick people who do that kind of thing to children and ruin their life. Do you see the suffering in that person, how that person has been brought up? There are many of them like that to be helped. You know, you are a writer. You can help these people. You can do more; you can help the children who are about to be molested by these people. You have the energy, the talent that you need.

“You have to make the vow, the determination to receive the Third Precept: I am aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct in family circles. I have seen children molested and suffer for their whole life, and I now undertake to practice the Third Precept in order to protect the integrity of families, individuals, and children. I am determined to learn ways to do that with my Sangha, because I know that if I continue to recite the Five Steps of Training, to hold Dharma discussions with my Sangha, and learn better ways to practice them, then I will be able to help.” During a Precepts transmission ceremony, the Sangha is there with their best presence and they witness to the fact that you are undertaking the path. During that moment, transformation takes place already, because you receive a lot of energy the moment you decide to receive and practice the Steps of Training.

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The healing takes place very quickly, and you put your heart into the practice. Concerning the Fourth Precept, we see that it is the art of deep listening and loving speech. We know that a lot of suffering has been created by our lack of capacity to listen deeply and with compassion to the other person. If there is no communication possible between you and her or him, that’s because you don’t practice; you are not able to listen with calm, with compassion. Avalokiteshvara is the one who shows the talent of listening deeply with compassion. When we evoke the name of Avalokiteshvara, we must be determined to learn his way of deep listening, compassionate listening.

In order to be able to listen with calm and compassion, we should train ourselves in the art of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, so that every time we hear things that shock our ears, that are provocative, that go against our common sense, we will not get irritated. Because the moment we show our irritation at the anger, the other person will stop talking. So we have to listen in such a way that encourages the other person to continue to

talk, because it's very healing for him or for her. You are the best therapist if you know the art of compassionate listening. You listen because you have compassion; you want to relieve him or her of the suffering and not because you want to listen in order to analyze, or judge, or condemn, or correct.

Compassionate listening is just to give the other person a chance to empty what is in their heart. Because he has had no one to listen to him, he has become more and more like a bomb, ready to explode; she also. So you are afraid of him, of her, you don't want to approach, because you are afraid of the explosion. And as you try to avoid him or her, they think that we despise them, we want to boycott them and the suffering will increase. So the only alternative is to train ourselves in the art of deep listening, compassionate listening, and go to him or her to help. If you cannot do that, who in the world can? Because you may be the closest person to him or to her. So the Fourth Step of Training is about deep listening and using loving speech.

How to practice that? Sit quietly, and maintain your mindful breathing, and nourish your compassion. Remind yourself that you are listening in order to relieve him or her of the suffering and not for anything else. Then when the other person says things that are wrong, incorrect, full of injustice, misunderstanding, you can continue to listen with serenity. That is the act of Avalokiteshvara. Many of us are able to do that after some time of practice and that is very healing. If at some point you feel that your capacity of listening has come to a limit, you cannot go on for another five minutes, so you have to bow and say "Darling, could we continue later on? I need to do something right now, I would love to continue to listen." Don't try too hard; because you should know your limit. I also practice that. I learn about my limits. I know that I should not try to do more than I can.

This is one thing I repeat over and over again to the people who attend retreats on helping professions: nurses and doctors and psychotherapists, social workers and so on. Because they see suffering a little bit too much, and they try too hard and they get burnt out very quickly. So you practice more, get refreshed, and then you offer another session of compassionate listening. If you are to explain to him or her about his or her misunderstanding, about your own suffering, then you should, we should, be able to use loving speech. We can tell the truth, but in such a way that the other person can see, can understand. We speak not for expressing our anger, just trying to help the other person to see. And that is why calm, serenity, and loving kindness should be there while we speak. Every time we feel some irritation coming up, we cannot swallow our suffering, and then we should stop. We should ask for another chance to do it; don't continue. We should know our limit.

That is about the Fourth Step of Training, the only kind of practice that can restore communication. That is something we have to practice as individuals, as partners, father and son, mother and daughter; and we have to practice as nation with nation, because our nation suffers, yes. But the other nation also suffers. We have to recognize that. We should not believe that we are the only nation that suffers. The other nation may be suffering at the same time, and on our part there may be misunderstanding, so we continue to blame each other and kill each other. The warring parties always do that.

If there is another nation that can come in and help, that's wonderful. But helping here does not mean to take sides, but to help both sides to calm down, to be able to tell the other side of the suffering in this side. Loving speech and deep listening should be applied between nations. That is why at the United Nations you also need the practice of listening. At peace talks, we do need that kind of discipline; and that is something, I hope, that will be possible to start in the twenty-first century.

Concerning the Fifth Precept, the Fifth Step of Training: Mindful consumption is the key word. Because you consume many things: food, drink, conversations, relationships, television, magazines, the so-called controlled items. Many of the items we consume contain

toxins that bring war into our body and bring war into our consciousness, and water the negative seeds in us.

Mindfulness of consumption is the only way to protect yourself from ingesting poisons every day. Practice and protect yourself and protect your children from that kind of unmindful consumption. That is the Fifth Precept, very important. How could you get rid of your depression if you don't practice the Fifth Step of Training?

The Five Steps of Training are to be studied more deeply by Dharma discussions, so that we may learn better ways of practicing mindfulness: mindfulness of speech, mindfulness of listening, mindfulness of consumption, mindfulness of protecting life, and so on. Who is the author of the Five Steps of Training? Who has created them? It's you yourself. It is our mindfulness that has brought about the insight of the Five Steps of Training. The Buddha was one of the people who have contributed to the art of mindful living. He proposed the Five Precepts, yes. But since that time, many generations have come and practiced, and contributed their insight in the practice. The Five Steps of Training as presented to you today are the fruit of many generations' practice. If during your practice you find out other things, you have insight that can improve the way to present the Five Steps of Training, to modify the wording, then you are among the coauthors of the Five Steps of Training. This is not something imposed on us by a deity, by a god. This is a collective product of those who practice mindfulness, and out of their insight, they see the path, they see the Fourth Truth, the Truth about the path of liberation.

For those of us who have practiced the Five Steps of Training, we see it as the way for the world to get out of these difficult situations. The Five Steps of Training are also instruments for dialogue with people of other spiritual traditions. This is the way we adopt so that a future would be possible for our children and their children. Have you tried something similar like this? What do you have to tell us, to help us to improve our practice? That is why during the conference organized by Gorbachev in San Francisco, the State of the World Forum, I did not talk much about other things. I just talked about mindful living and the Five Wonderful Precepts.

So all of you who have received the Five Steps of Training, learned the art of mindful living, I hope that you have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of these Steps of Training. I hope that you will continue to have a Sangha where you are, so that you can continue to explore, to deepen your understanding. Then you'll be able to share them with many people around you, so that we have a future for our children and their children for the twenty-first century, and don't repeat the same kind of errors and mistakes that we have made during this twentieth century.

Mara and the Buddha – Embracing our Suffering

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 6, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends, today is the 6th of August, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

I would like to tell you a story that took place a number of years ago. One day I saw the Venerable Ananda—you know who he is? Ananda is a cousin of the Buddha, a very handsome man with a very good memory. He memorized everything the Buddha said, and after the Buddha passed away, he repeated exactly what the Buddha said during his life. Then other monks tried to learn and memorize also. Later on, all this was put down into writing and that is why we have the Sutras today. “Sutras” means the teaching of the Buddha in written form. They exist in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and in Vietnamese, but originally it was in a kind of Bengali, very close to Pali and Sanskrit.

One day I saw the Venerable Ananda practicing walking meditation in front of the hut of the Buddha. You know, Ananda became a monk, a student of the Buddha. He was the attendant of the Buddha during many years. He took very good care of the Buddha. Of course, the Buddha loved him and there were people who were jealous of him. Sometimes Ananda was so concerned about the happiness of the Buddha that he forgot about himself. Sometimes he did not enjoy what was there in the present moment, being much younger than the Buddha.

One day standing on the hill looking down, the Buddha saw beautiful rice fields. The rice was ripe, about to be harvested. But because Ananda was only thinking of how to make the Buddha comfortable, he didn't see it. So the Buddha pointed to the rice fields below and said, “Ananda can you see it's beautiful?” It was like a bell of mindfulness—suddenly Ananda saw that the rice fields down there were so beautiful. The Buddha smiled and said, “Ananda, I want the robes of the monks and the nuns to be designed in the form of rice fields—golden colors like the rice that is already ripe, small portions of the rice fields like that.” Ananda said, “Yes, that is possible, I will go tell my brothers and from now on we will make the *sanghati*, the robes of the monks and nuns, in the form of rice fields.”

Another time when Ananda was with the Buddha, north of the Gangha River in the city of Vaisali, the Buddha pointed to the city, the trees, and the hills, and said to Ananda “Don't you see Vaisali is beautiful?” Then Ananda took the time to look at the beauty of the city.

The day I saw Ananda practicing walking meditation around the hut of the Buddha, he was trying to protect the Buddha from guests. Many guests came, and they always wanted to have a cup of tea with the Buddha, and the Buddha could not just receive guests all day. So Ananda was trying to help. That day Ananda was practicing walking around the hut of the Buddha. It's not exactly a hut, but a cave—the Buddha was staying in a cave, very cold. And Ananda saw someone coming, coming, coming in his direction.

He had the impression that he knew this person, but just forgot his name. When that person had come very close, he recognized him as Mara. You know Mara? Mara is the one who had caused the Buddha a lot of difficulties. The night before the Buddha attained final enlightenment, Mara was there to tempt him. Buddha was tempted by Mara. Mara is the tempter. He always wanted the Buddha to be a politician, to be a king, or a president, or a

foreign minister, or running a business, having a lot of money, a lot of beautiful women; and he was always trying to tempt the Buddha so that Buddha would go into these directions. That is Mara.

Ananda saw Mara approaching. He felt uncomfortable. Why should Mara come at this time? But Mara saw him already—Ananda could not hide himself—so he had to stand there and wait for Mara and they had to say things like, “Hello, how do you do?” People say that even if they don't like each other. They say, “Hello, good morning, how are you,” and so on. They don't mean it. Then they come to the real thing: “What are you here for Mara?” “I want to visit the Buddha,” Mara said, “I want to see him.” Ananda said, “Why should you want to see the Buddha? I don't think the Buddha has time for you.”

You know when the head of a corporation or a director of an office doesn't want to see you she says, “Go and tell him I am in conference.” And Ananda was about to say something like that, but he remembered that he had to practice the Five Precepts and could not tell a lie. So he refrained from saying that the Buddha is in conference. He was frank. He said, “Mara, why should the Buddha see you? What is the purpose and are you not ashamed of yourself? Don't you remember that in the old days, under the Bodhi tree, you were defeated by the Lord? How could you bear seeing him again? I don't think that he will see you. You are the enemy of the Buddha,” and Ananda continued to say what was really in his heart.

You know Mara was very aware, a very experienced person. He just stood there and looked at the young Venerable Ananda and smiled. After Ananda finished, he said, “What did you say Ananda, you said the Buddha has an enemy?” Then Ananda felt very uncomfortable to say that the Buddha had an enemy. That did not seem to be the right thing to say, but he just said it. He said, “I don't think that the Buddha will see you, you are his enemy,” So if you are not very concentrated, very deep, very mindful, you may say things like that against yourself, against what you know and what you practice. When Mara heard Ananda say that he is the enemy of the Buddha, he burst out laughing and laughing and laughing, and that made Ananda very uncomfortable. “What, you're telling me that the Buddha also has enemies?”

So finally Ananda was defeated, completely defeated. He had to go in and announce the visit of Mara, hoping that the Lord would say, “I have no time for him, I need to continue sitting.” But to his surprise, the Buddha smiled beautifully and said, “Mara, wonderful! Ask him to come in.” That surprised Ananda. Remember Ananda was young with not a lot of experience. All of us are Ananda, you know. So Ananda had to go out again and bow to Mara and ask him to come in because the Lord wanted Mara to be his guest.

The Buddha stood up, and guess what? The Buddha did hugging meditation with Mara. Ananda did not understand. The Buddha invited Mara to sit on the best place in the cave—a stone bench. And he turned to his beloved disciple and said, “Ananda, please make tea for us.” You might guess that Ananda was not entirely happy. Making tea for the Buddha—yes. He could do that 1,000 times a day. But making tea for Mara was not a very pleasant idea. But since the Lord had asked, Ananda went into a corner and began to make tea for them and tried to look deeply, why things were like that.

When the tea was offered to the Buddha and the guest, Ananda stood behind the Buddha and tried to be mindful of what the Buddha would need. You see, if you become a novice, you have to practice being an attendant to your teacher. You stand behind him or her and you try to know what your teacher needs each moment. But it did not seem that the Buddha needed anything. He just looked at Mara in a very loving way and he said, “Dear friend, how have

you been? Is everything okay?" Mara said "No, not okay at all. Things go very badly with me. You know something Buddha, I'm very tired of being Mara. Now I want to be someone else, like you. You are kind, wherever you go you are welcome. You are bowed to with lotus flowers, and you have many monks and nuns with very lovely faces following you. You are offered bananas and oranges and kiwis and all kinds of fruits.

"As a Mara I have to wear the appearance of a Mara. Everywhere I go I have to speak in a very tricky language. I have to show that I am really Mara. I have to use many tricks, I have to use the language of Mara, I have to have an army of wicked little Maras and if I breathe in and breathe out, every time I breathe out I have to show that smoke is coming from my nose. But I don't mind very much all these things. What I mind most is that my disciples, the little Maras, are beginning to talk about transformation and healing. They're beginning to talk about liberation, Buddhahood. That's one thing I cannot bear. So I have come to propose to you that we exchange roles. You be a Mara and I'll be a Buddha."

When the Venerable Ananda heard that, he was very scared. Oh, his heart was about to stop! What if his teacher accepted the exchange of roles? He would be the attendant of a Mara. So he was hoping that the Buddha would refuse the proposal. Then the Buddha looked at Mara very calmly, smiling to him, and asked this question: "Mara, do you think it's a lot of fun being a Buddha? People don't understand me—they misunderstand me and put a lot into my mouth that I have never said. They have built temples where they put statues of me in copper, in plaster, sometimes in emerald, in gold. And they attract a lot of people who offer them bananas, oranges, citrus, and a lot of things.

"Sometimes they carried me on the street in a procession and I was sitting on a cart decorated with flowers, doing like this—like a drunk person. I don't like being a Buddha like that. So you know, in the name of the Buddha—in my name—they have done a lot of things that are very harmful to the Dharma. You should know that being a Buddha is also very difficult. If you want to be a teacher and if you want people to practice the Dharma correctly, that is not an easy job. I don't think that you would enjoy being the Buddha. The best thing is for each of us to stay in his or her own position and try to improve the situation and enjoy what we are doing."

If you were there with Ananda and if you were very mindful, you would have had the feeling that Buddha and Mara were a couple of friends who need each other—like day and night, like flowers and garbage. This is a very deep teaching of Buddhism, and I trust that the children will understand—very deep. You may compare Buddha with the flowers, very fresh, very beautiful. And you may compare Mara with the garbage. It doesn't smell good. There are a lot of flies who like to come to the garbage. It's not pleasant to touch, to hold in your hand, to smell the garbage.

Yet all flowers become garbage. That is the meaning of impermanence: all flowers have to become garbage. If you practice Buddhist meditation, you find out about very interesting things—like about the garbage. Although garbage stinks, although garbage is not pleasant to hold in your hand, if you know how to take care of the garbage, you will transform it back into flowers. You know gardeners don't throw away garbage. They preserve the garbage and take care of the garbage, and in just a few months the garbage becomes compost. They can use that compost to grow lettuce, tomatoes, and flowers. We have to say that organic gardeners are capable of seeing flowers in garbage, seeing cucumbers in garbage. That is what the Buddha described as the non-dualistic way of looking at things.

If you see things like that, you will understand that the garbage is capable of becoming a flower, and the flower can become garbage. Thanks to the flowers there is garbage, because if you keep flowers for three weeks they become garbage, and thanks to the garbage there will be flowers. You now have an idea of the relationship between Buddha and Mara. Mara is not very pleasant, but if you know how to help Mara, to transform Mara, Mara will become Buddha. If you don't know how to take care of the Buddha, Buddha will become Mara.

You see there are people who, in the beginning, love each other very much. They believe that without each other they cannot survive. Their love is so important. They cling to each other because they think that love between them is the only element that can help them survive. But because they don't know how to preserve the love and take care of their love, they get angry at each other, they misunderstand each other, and later on love is transformed slowly into hate. There are those who say, "I hate you, I don't want to see you anymore, I wish you would die." Those people in the past had proclaimed that they needed each other, they could not survive without each other, they loved each other, so love transforms into hatred. It's like a kind of flower transformed into garbage.

So what you learn today is very deep. Flowers and garbage are of an organic nature because both flowers and garbage are living realities. Buddha and Mara are also organic, and they need each other. It is thanks to the difficulties, thanks to the temptations, that the Buddha has overcome his suffering and his ignorance and become a fully enlightened being. The day before yesterday, I gave a Dharma talk on suffering, and I said that if you look deeply into the nature of your suffering, you will find a way out of it. So if you want a flower, you have to use the garbage. That is why the people who suffer a lot now should not be discouraged. Suffering is their garbage. If they know how to take good care of their garbage they will be able to make the flower come back to them, the flower of peace, of joy. The Buddha shows us the way to do so.

When I was in Moscow several years ago, we offered a retreat to Muscovites, and a few Christians from Korea held a kind of a retreat very close to ours. Some of them came to our friends and asked why they should follow the Buddha. The reason we should not follow the Buddha, according to them, is that Buddha is a mortal. "Mortal" means someone who has to die. In their mind what we need is someone who will not die. Since the Buddha is someone who has to be born and who has to die, he cannot help us—that is the meaning of the declaration made by those friends.

I think it's a wonderful thing to die, because if you are born and you die, it means you are a living reality, like the flower and the garbage: they are living things. We are for life. Anything that is not born, not dying, not growing, is not alive. To be alive means to be born, to grow, to get old, to die, to be born again, to grow, to get old, to die and to continue like that. How do you expect life to be possible without change? But there is one thing that the children may like to know. There is a difference between "flower" and "floweriness."

The flower may die, but not the floweriness. Even if a flower has become garbage, you know you can bring the flower back. If you are a good gardener, if you know how to use compost, seeds, water, you will be able to bring the flower back. This means a flower may die, but floweriness is something that is there all the time: because floweriness is not a thing, floweriness is the nature of a thing. So it is with Buddha and Buddha nature. Buddha nature is called in Sanskrit *buddhata*. We all have *buddhata* inside of us, this Buddha nature. If we want, we can make the Buddha be born every moment in our hearts. That is a very wonderful thing. You can make the Buddha be born in your heart every moment, because you have

Buddhahood in you, you have the nature of the Buddha in you. Buddha is a living thing: Buddha is born, Buddha grows up, Buddha hides himself away, Buddha dies. But Buddhahood is there in us.

We might think that terms like “Buddha nature” are difficult because we don’t know that this is something very simple, very simple. Children can understand very well. We have floweriness in us; we have “garbageness” in us also. Don’t think that they are two enemies—no. They look like enemies—Ananda was not very skillful in seeing that—but they can support each other. In Buddhism, there is no fight between good and evil—that is the most wonderful thing in the Buddhist practice! There is no fight between good and evil. Good and evil are both organic matters. If you have understanding and wisdom, you will know how to handle both the flower and the garbage in you, you can make the Buddha be born every moment of your life, and peace and happiness will be possible. This is a very deep Dharma talk for young people. I hope that you will be able to deepen your understanding of this Dharma talk. Your big brothers and sisters and the Dharma teachers will help you. This may be a very important lesson that you will learn in your life.

[To the children:] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell. Children leave]

In the beginning of this year’s summer opening, we reflected on the fact that, for healing to take place in our body and in our soul, we have to learn how to allow our body and our consciousness to rest. That is the practice of stopping, of calming in order for healing to start. We talked about the animals in the jungle. When they are wounded or get sick, they always look for a quiet and safe place to lie down. They just lie down for many, many days. The animals do not think of hunting or eating or doing anything, because they feel they need to rest and they know that only resting can bring healing. They don’t think of eating at all.

We humans we might think that if we don’t eat anything, we grow weak and we cannot heal. We are not as wise as these animals, because fasting is a very wonderful way to help the body and also the soul to heal. Not thinking of doing anything—eating, running, making projects for the future, even for healing, practicing intensive meditation—all these things have to be stopped. No effort should be made either by the body or by the consciousness. We have to allow our body to really rest and also our consciousness. That is *samatha*, that is the practice of stopping and calming, and we have to learn it.

There are many of us who have no capacity for resting, of allowing our body and our mind to rest. That is because in us there is a very strong tendency to do something—running. We have run without stopping in the last four or five thousand years. It has become a habit. We even run in our dreams, during our sleep. So we have to start the practice of stopping. That is why practicing being in the present moment, touching the wonders of life that are present in this moment, is a very wonderful and easy way of resting.

There’s a tendency for us to think that our happiness should be searched for in the future, by doing something. Even our health should be “searched for” by doing something. But we don’t know that not doing anything may be the key to restoring our health. Many of us are obsessed by the idea that we have to get more nutrients. We buy vitamins, “one-a-day,” and we take one pill every morning and things like that. Many of us are motivated by that kind of desire. Not many of us are aware that we have a reserve in our body that we can use for up to three or

four weeks without eating. Those of us who practice fasting and drinking only water, can go for many weeks and we don't have to stop the daily things. We can still go to sitting meditation, walking meditation, cleaning in the kitchen, in the bathroom, participating in Dharma talks. We can do that many weeks without eating. In the process, we enjoy doing these things. And the toxins we have, from the third day on, begin to get out because we are drinking a lot of water, we are practicing a lot of walking meditation and deep breathing and we clean our bodies, so the toxins can get out. And after three weeks, you look much better—even if you don't eat anything. Your skin, the expression on your face, your smile—you may look like a new person. That is not because you take a lot of vitamins, or eat a lot of nutrients, it is because you don't eat anything. You allow your body to rest.

The same thing is true of your consciousness. There are a lot of toxins within that have been accumulating over the years. We have ingested the toxins—the fear, the craving, the anger, the despair—in our daily life by touching this or that without mindfulness. So all these poisons have brought into being our depression, our anxiety, our sorrow—and this kind of garbage should be transformed, eliminated. If only we could allow ourselves to touch the refreshing and healing elements in our daily life, a process of detoxification would take place. Are you able to breathe in and to breathe out, and enjoy it? Just breathing in and breathing out. Is there anything interesting in breathing in and breathing out? Breathing in and breathing out is a wonderful thing. You are alive. The fact that you are breathing in is already a miracle. There are many people who want to breathe in but they cannot breathe in because they are already dead. We want them to breathe in but they lie there, lifeless. So to allow your body to breathe in and to become aware that you are breathing in, that you are alive, can be a source of deep happiness.

This morning I practiced like that in sitting meditation. When you breathe in, you might touch nature around you; when you breathe out, you allow yourself not to do anything, you rest completely.

[Bell]

The practice of samatha, stopping, is the practice of doing nothing—trying not to do anything, just allowing your body and your mind to rest. We know that it's not easy, because we have already a habit of running and working, both in our body and in our mind. That is why putting yourself in a Sangha where there are people who are able to stop is very important. When you come to a retreat, where there are people who have the capacity of stopping, of being there in the present moment, you can profit from their presence, their energy. They are able to be happy with the blue sky, with a little flower blooming in the grass, with each step they make. Happiness is being manufactured every moment. They don't run; they are able to stop and to live deeply every moment of their daily life. It's very important that we find ourselves among those people, because touching them, we will be able to do the same after some time.

When you are on your cushion or walking, you just practice breathing in or breathing out in order to be there, just to be there. Because your mindful presence is the agent of love and care for the pain, for the suffering in you. You have not been there for yourself. You have been running and you have neglected yourself. To be loved means to be embraced by the attention, by the energy, of the person you love. When the animal stops and lies down, it's doing that for itself. It allows itself time to rest and to heal—it is there for itself. We have to be there for ourselves. We are wounded, perhaps even deeply wounded in our body and in our soul. Who will be there for us? We have to be there for ourselves first. And the Buddha will be there for us, because the Buddha is inside of us.

To be able to establish oneself in the present moment, to know what is going on in that moment, to touch everything that is happening in that moment, is the practice. It does not require a lot of struggle; it does not require any struggle at all. Just allow yourself to be. There is a tendency to think that happiness, health, success are things you have to run to in order to get. That is why we have sacrificed the present moment. We have viewed the present moment as a means to get things in the future. That is a tendency to be stopped.

We are committed to a certain idea of happiness. We think that if we cannot realize this or that, if we cannot change this or that, then happiness will never be possible. Because of our commitment to that idea of happiness, we are not at peace with ourselves. We are trying to do something, to realize something, but maybe happiness is already there. All the conditions for you to be happy are already there. You need to recognize them. How can you recognize them if you are not there?

Maybe you have not realized that the sun in the sky is a condition for your happiness. Just take one second to look, and you see that all life on Earth is possible because of the sun. All our food comes from light, from the sun. And when you look at the sun like that, you see the sun as your father, your mother—it is nourishing you every day. The sun is always there for you. And you might complain that “nobody is taking care of me, nobody loves me, nobody pays attention to me,” but the sun is one thing that is nourishing you every second of your daily life.

The earth, the trees, the water, the air, the baker, the farmer, the birds, the insects. There are those of us who have practiced stopping and dwell in the present moment, and we are able to touch the many conditions of our happiness that are available in the here and the now. We find out that we don’t need more, because these conditions are more than enough to be happy. Stopping is very important. As long as you continue to run, happiness is very difficult. Stopping. Stopping allows your body and your mind to rest. Stopping allows you to recognize the conditions for your happiness that are already there.

The two elements of Buddhist meditation are stopping and looking deeply. You can only look deeply into the nature of things when they are there, when you are able to stop. Samatha is stopping, calming, and *vipasyana* is looking deeply. Sometimes you only need to stop, and suddenly a deep vision of reality will come like that. When the waves on the lake are calm, the surface of the lake is calm without waves, the full moon just reflects in the lake—the lake doesn’t have to run and look for the moon. Allow yourself to be in the present moment; enjoy touching the refreshing and healing elements that are around you and within you. Whether we believe they are or are not there, they are there. Allowing yourself to touch these healing elements will allow the garbage to become compost, and the flowers to reappear in the garden of your heart.

When you are there for yourself, there is an energy that embraces you, embraces your pain, embraces your suffering, your fear, your despair. It also embraces the good, positive qualities within you. The capacity of being joyful again, of being happy again, of being loving and tolerant—these qualities are within us, and they need to be embraced in order to grow; these are flowers. And the fear, despair, and sorrow in us need to be embraced in order to become compost. They will nourish the flowers. The Buddha needs Mara in order to grow beautifully as a flower and also Mara needs the Buddha, because Mara has a certain role to play.

So suffering is very important for your happiness. You cannot understand, you cannot love, until you know what suffering is. The joy of having something to eat is possible only if you know what hunger is. In some areas of China, when people meet each other, instead of asking, “How do you do?” or “How are you?” they ask, “Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten something to eat?” Because we know there is hunger, death. So our love is expressed in a very simple way: Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten anything to eat yet?

The tendency is to want to remove and to clear away the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair in us. We just want the Buddha or God to be like a surgeon who can cut out anything we don't want of ourselves, get it out of our system. In the light of non-duality, not only are we flowers, but we are also the garbage in us. We cannot just get rid of us. Sometimes we are love, sometimes we are anger; love is us, but anger is also us. So we have to treat both love and anger on an equal basis, like the Buddha was treating Mara. Mara didn't understand. Ananda also didn't understand. But the Buddha, he understood. He was teaching both of them the nature of non-duality between suffering and happiness.

The energy of mindfulness is the energy that allows us to be in the present moment, to embrace ourselves, our suffering, our despair, our sorrow; and also the seeds of joy and peace and love that have become weak in us because we have not been able to water and cultivate these seeds to help them to be stronger. So the practice is the practice of embracing, and it is clear that the energy with which you can embrace yourself is the energy of mindfulness. “Darling, I am there for you.” When we love someone we want to make such a declaration, “Darling I am there for you.” And you have to be really there for her. Your presence is the greatest gift you can make to the person you love. To be there, it's not easy. You have to be there with one hundred per cent of yourself. You have to be really mindful, with all your attention. That energy has the power of healing and of making the other person happy. In this case it is self-love, and we all know that the love we have for another depends on our self-love. If we know how to take care of ourselves, if we know how to nourish and to transform ourselves, we will be able to take care of the other person. So the object of love is our self first—our body and our consciousness. Embracing yourself in the present moment is the practice.

By being there entirely, you recognize that not only suffering is there, something else is there—the wonders of life, the refreshing and healing elements from within and around and you may like to practice touching them. Look at the sky; listen to the rain, smile to it. It's wonderful that it's raining, it's wonderful that the sky is blue this morning, it's wonderful that I am here, alive. It's wonderful that I can walk, it's wonderful that my heart still functions normally. There are so many things you can enjoy. When one tree in the garden dies you may forget that all the other trees are still alive. You let your sorrow dominate, and suddenly you lose everything. When a tree is dying in my garden, yes, I know it, but there are other trees that are still green, healthy. If you remember that, you will not be drowned by your sorrow, and you will have enough strength to save the tree that is dying or replace it with another tree.

Make your heart large so that you may be able to see that the conditions for your happiness are there, and injustice, cruelty, or meanness is not enough to ruin your life. You can accept it easily, because your heart is large, and you can receive it without resentment and anger. It's like when you throw some dirt into the river, the river would not be angry. The river is willing to accept that dirt, and it can transform that dirt overnight. There's so much water in the river, so much mud in the water that the amount of dirt that you throw into the river will be transformed overnight. If you throw that dirt into a container of water in your home that would not be the same thing. You know that the water in the container will no longer be

drinkable, you have to throw it away. But when you throw that amount of dirt into the river, people from the city still continue to drink the water from the river because it's large. The river has the capacity of transforming and healing. So practice being like a river, that is what the Buddha recommended to us.

Practice being like the earth. Whether people throw on earth flowers, perfumes, rice, curries or they throw on it urine, excrement, the earth will be willing to accept all without any resentment, because earth is large and earth has the power to transform. And earth is always there for us. So the Buddha told Rahula, "My dear, practice like earth, practice like water in the river and you will not suffer because your heart is big."

So coming back to embrace ourselves, to start the process of healing, to touch the positive elements does not seem to be a difficult practice. You only need a Sangha where there are people who are doing that and who enjoy just doing that. When you come to the Meditation Hall and sit down holding your plate of food, you may do it with a lot of pleasure. Don't think of it as a hard practice. Yes, we don't talk during the whole meal, you sit quiet in an erect position during the whole meal. Yes, we do that. But many of us enjoy doing that. We don't have to talk, we don't have to think, we don't have to do anything: we just realize complete rest during the whole meal. To be able to share a meal with a Sangha in mindfulness, not to have to do anything at all, to just enjoy every morsel of your food, touching your food deeply without any thinking, without making any project in your mind is the practice, the practice of stopping and resting.

When you pick up a piece of string bean, look at it, smile, and call it by its true name, "string bean." And you realize with some mindfulness and concentration that the piece of string bean is a wonder of life, exactly like you—you are a wonder of life, you are a miracle. The piece of string bean has been made by clouds, sunshine, the earth, the minerals, the air, the water, everything. This piece of string bean is really an ambassador coming to you from the cosmos if you know how to receive it, how to be with it, how to chew it mindfully and joyfully. Eating a piece of string bean may give joy. What is the use of eating a piece of string bean? To get nutrition? No, you just enjoy the piece of string bean, you enjoy yourself, the presence of the bean, you enjoy the moment, being with yourself and with the Sangha.

We like to chew our food thirty times, forty times, fifty times. During that time we don't chew anything else, we don't chew our projects, our sorrow, our anxiety. Allow it to sleep, you are embracing it now by the practice of being there, mindful. Eating is a practice, a practice of not doing anything, a practice of stopping. And with some intelligence, we can make the time of eating a time of joy. It may be oppressive not talking, not laughing, not making movements. But they are only the habits; you have to learn the habit of resting, it's very important.

Sitting on your cushion during sitting meditation is also practicing resting, and practicing walking meditation, just touching the earth and realizing the wonder of being alive and walking on the earth, this is also the practice of resting. In every moment you allow yourself to be there and to take care of your sorrow, your anxiety, your pain. They may be sleeping quietly down there in the bottom of your consciousness, or they may be emerging on the surface. In any case, embrace them; embrace them with your true presence, because the energy of mindfulness is the energy of being there for you, for the people you love. The sun is there for you, the moon is there for you, the trees are there for you, the water is there for you, and you should be there for them also, especially for yourself. You are the person who needs you the most. Call your name, call your name in silence—that person has suffered, that person needs you desperately, you should go back and embrace her, embrace him.

[Bell]

Now let us do a meditation exercise. Let us visualize ourselves as young people who are caught in a situation of drugs. There are so many young people who are addicted to drugs in Europe, in America, everywhere. This is a big problem of the twentieth century, and we don't know whether we will be able to solve it during the first half of the twenty-first century. This is some garbage that needs to be taken care of. Who are these young people who every day seek desperately to have some money to buy some drugs? Even if you know how to get some drugs, you don't know how to get the money. You may have tried to steal the money from your parents, which is safer than stealing from other people.

There are so many of us who suffer in Europe, in Asia, in America. We are suffering, we are despair, we are sorrow, we need to be embraced. We are the garbage of humanity. We want to go back to being flowers. Who will help us? What kind of presence could be given to us? We suffer; we don't need suppression, we don't need the army, we don't need the police. We really need a kind of presence that helps us to transform, because we don't want to be in this position. But we are in this position, a position where we have to seek every day a means to get some drugs. Where is humanity? Who can help us? Who can manifest their true presence in order to embrace us? Who knows that we are suffering? They think that we only need punishment. They don't know how difficult it is for us to get out of our situation.

The energy that we need is enlightenment, is mindfulness. We need people to know that we suffer, that we don't want to be like this for a long time, because maybe tomorrow it will be too difficult for us to continue and we may have to kill ourselves. So we need desperately some kind of presence that tells us they know that we are there, we suffer and they are there for us.

The people in the Church don't seem to understand us. There may be nice people in the Church, they may want to do something, but in a majority of the cases they are preaching to us a kind of teaching that cannot respond to our real need. They are trying to impose on us the kind of life that does not seem to fit us. Understanding and compassion does not seem to come from the direction of the Church.

Our parents, they don't seem to be happy with each other. They make each other suffer. They created hell in our family. We have not been able to see happiness in the family. We have not experienced harmony, compassion and love in our family life. They don't seem to understand us. They don't seem to love us. How could love be possible without understanding? We don't see anything beautiful in this life. Everything is ugly. We don't see anything meaningful in this life. We don't see anything true in this life, everything seems to be fake. So we are hungry ghosts, looking for something meaningful and true. Since we have not found anything, we have to forget we are there and drugs seem to be the only thing for us. This is a block of garbage produced collectively during the twentieth century.

Meditation on this scale means to produce a presence of enlightened people—governmental people, doctors, psychotherapists, educators, artists and so on. We have to come as a group, as a Sangha, to produce our true presence. “Dear people, we know that you are there, we know that you suffer, that is why we have come to you and embrace you, not with the intention to punish or to blame, but just to embrace you. We want to understand you better; we want to love you.” That is the presence they need: that is collective meditation. Maybe in coming together our insight will be deep enough to provide these people with a positive environment

for their healing and their liberation—a healing center, rehabilitation center, where these young people can get the minimum dose of drugs they need every day so that they don't have to go and kill or steal in order to get the drugs. Where they can be taken good care of, and get help in order to reduce the amount of drugs and start the process of healing, touching the things that surround us that are healthy, that are refreshing.

If those of us who are doctors, governmental people, artists, psychotherapists don't practice for ourselves, we won't have insight and compassion and understanding; how can we help take care of the garbage we have produced? Who is responsible for producing this garbage? All of us. Blaming other people will not help, especially blaming the victims. We have to realize that they are us, we are them, that our life is made of flowers and garbage at the same time. We have to accept both and to take care of both in the best way that we can, with the understanding, the calm, provided by our practice.

The government of Holland has tried to do things, the government of France, of Spain, many governments; the government of the United States of America also has tried many ways to help. But where are we? Haven't we realized that we are responsible for the production of the garbage? Our society is produced in such a way that we create hungry ghosts very young, every day, by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands. They are everywhere, wandering around without anything to believe in, without anything to love, without anything that looks true and good and beautiful.

I don't know whether during the first half of the twenty-first century we can handle this problem of drugs, of the hungry ghosts that we produce. We have to call on people in all walks of life—parents, Church, teachers, businessmen and others—to stop and look. This is very important, stopping and looking at our present situation and considering how to start transforming garbage into flowers. We have to organize Dharma discussions on a very big scale. We have to organize it in our family, we have to organize it in our city, we have to make it into a national debate where people may have a say, where each person makes a contribution of his or her insight. That is a matter for all of us, that is meditation.

As individuals we have problems; but we also have problems as families, as cities, as nations, and meditation in the twenty-first century should be a collective practice. Without a Sangha we cannot achieve much. When we focus our attention on suffering, on the garbage on a larger scale, maybe the little problems that we have within our individual circle will vanish, because by practicing being there we begin to connect with, to relate to, other people who are also ourselves. That way our loneliness, our feeling of being cut off, will no longer be there, and we will be able to do things together. Like when we come to Plum Village, we try to be part of the Sangha, we practice as a Sangha. It's much easier, and transformation will take place much more quickly if you don't just practice as individuals. When I practice walking I make mindful and beautiful steps. I know that I do that not only for myself, but also for all of my friends who are here; because everyone, who sees me taking a step like that has confidence and is reminded to do the same. And when they make a step in the present moment, smiling and making peace with themselves, they inspire us all, they are doing that for all of us. You breathe for me, I walk for you, we do things together and this is practicing as a Sangha.

So today please enjoy your walking if it doesn't rain. If it rains, you enjoy the rain. We also have a formal meal together. A formal meal is a time when we sit together as a Sangha, we enjoy the collective energy of mindfulness, and each of us allows the mindful energy of the Sangha to penetrate in. Even if you don't do anything, just stop thinking and allow yourself to

absorb the collective energy of the Sangha. It's very healing. Don't struggle, don't try to do something. Allow yourself to rest, and the energy of the Sangha will help. Eat your meal very slowly, mindfully; enjoy every morsel of food. That is the most important thing to do during eating, just enjoy every morsel of food, chew it carefully and slowly. That allows the pain, the sorrow in us to be embraced.

Meditations for the Sick and Dying

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 11, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the eleventh of August 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and our Dharma talk will be in English. Today we are going to learn the practice of the four mantras, because this is the kind of practice that I would like everyone to bring home and do every day. It's very pleasant and it's easy. A mantra is a magic formula. Every time you pronounce a mantra, you can transform the situation right away; you don't have to wait. It is a magic formula you have to learn to recite when the time is appropriate. And the condition that makes it effective is your mindfulness, your concentration. It means that this mantra can only be recited when you are perfectly mindful and concentrated. Otherwise, it would not work. But you don't need to be mindful or concentrated one hundred percent; even eighty percent can produce a miracle. And we all are capable of being mindful and concentrated.

The first mantra is "Darling, I am here for you." I wish that children from Italy would practice it in Italian, French children would practice in French, Vietnamese in Vietnamese, and so on. We don't have to practice it in Sanskrit or Tibetan. Why do we have to practice this mantra, "Darling, I am here for you?" Because when you love someone, you have to offer him or her the best you have. And the best that you can offer your beloved one is your true presence. Your true presence is very important to him or to her.

I know a young man of eleven or twelve years old. One day his father asked him, "Tomorrow will be your birthday. What do you want? I'll buy it for you." The young man was not very excited. He knew that his father was a very rich person—the director of a large corporation—and he could afford to buy anything the young man wanted. He was extremely rich, so it was no problem at all to buy a birthday gift for his son. But the young man didn't want anything. He was not very happy, and not because he did not have many things to play with. He was not happy because his father was not with him—he was always absent. He never spent enough time at home. He traveled like an arrow. And what the young man needed the most was the presence of his father. He had a father, but it did not seem very clear that he had a father, because the father was so busy.

You know when someone is rich, he has try to work very hard in order to continue to be rich; that is the problem. Once you are rich, you cannot afford to be poor. That is why you have to use all your time and energy in order to work, work, work, day and night, in order to keep being rich. And I have seen many people like that. So the father does not have time for his children. Although the children in principle have a father, they don't really have one. What they need the most is the presence of their father beside them. So the young man did not know what to say. But finally he got enlightened. He said, "Daddy, I know what I want." "What?" And the father was waiting for an electric train, or something like that. The young man said, "I want you!" And it is very true, that children—if they don't have their father or their mother beside them—are not very happy. So what they want the most is the presence of the person they love.

When you love someone, the most precious gift you can make to him or her is your true presence. That is why you have to practice in such a way that you are there. You are there one hundred percent and you look at him or her, and you say, "Darling, I am really here for you." That is the greatest gift that we can make to our most beloved one. But this is not only a

statement. You know a mantra is not a statement. A mantra is something you utter out of reality—that means you have to be there one hundred percent in order for what you say to become a true mantra. So in order to be really there you need one minute or two of practice—you breathe in: “Breathing in, I am calm, breathing out, I smile. Breathing in, I am really here, breathing out, I’m really here.” You do that a few times, and suddenly you are really there. It’s wonderful. You are not caught with your problems, you are not caught with your projects, you are not caught by the future, or by the past. You are really there, available, to the person you love. Then when you are sure that you are truly there—body and mind together—you go in the direction of the person you love, and looking at him or her mindfully, knowing that that person is really there and you are there, you smile and you say, “Darling, I am here for you, I am really here for you.”

To many of us that is the greatest gift that we can make to our beloved one. If the father understood that, he would practice mindful breathing or walking for a few minutes, he would stop all his projects, he would cancel one of his meetings and just sit down, really close to his boy, and he would put his arm around the little boy, and look into the eyes of his boy and say, “Darling, this time I’m really here for you.” That is a very wonderful moment, that is a moment when life is really real and deep: father is there and son is there. Love is there because they are there for each other, they are available to each other. When you love someone, you have to make yourself available to the person you love. And this is the practice of meditation—to make yourself available one hundred percent as a gift to the person you love.

So I’d like the children to write that formula down on a sheet of paper in their own language, beautifully, and decorate it with flowers and fruits and birds. When you go home, you stick that mantra on your wall and you practice every day with the person you love. “Darling, I am really here for you,” that is the first mantra. My friends in America have painted that mantra on a tee-shirt. If you want, you might like to make a tee-shirt and paint that magic formula in Italian or French or German or Dutch. When you wear that tee-shirt, “Darling, I am here for you,” you might just look at that person and point to the mantra on your tee-shirt and smile.

The second mantra is, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” This is also a very easy mantra to practice. Because to love means to acknowledge the presence of the person you love. In order to acknowledge that he is there or she is there, you have to have the time. If you are too busy, how can you acknowledge his or her presence? And the most important condition for doing this mantra is that you be there one hundred percent. If you are not there one hundred percent, you cannot recognize his or her presence. When you are loved by someone, you need that person to recognize that you are there—whether you are very young or seventy years old or eighty years old, you still behave the same way. We always need the other person to acknowledge that we are here. We want to be embraced by his or her attention. Not only children need that but adults also need that. We need to be embraced by the energy of mindfulness of the other person. So if you are there one hundred percent and you go to the other person, you look at him or her, you smile and you say, “Darling, I know you are there and I am very happy.” That is to recognize the presence of the person you love and to say that you are very happy that she is still alive, available to us at any time. You know such a practice can make the other person very happy right away—you don’t need to wait five minutes. That is the Buddhadharma—effective right away. If you are shy, you have to learn. You have to lock the door, turn the light off, and try to practice the mantra, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” And when you are sure that you can do it, open the door and go to him or her and practice.

You know, I practice that not only with people, but I practice that with the moon, the Morning Star, the magnolia flowers. Last year when I went to Korea, I was housed in a Protestant seminary and my little house was surrounded by magnolias, and it was springtime. The magnolia blossoms were very beautiful. They are a white color—like snow. I practiced walking meditation among the magnolia blossoms. I felt so happy, so wonderful. So I would stop and look closely at each magnolia flower. I smiled, breathed in and out and I said, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy,” and I bowed to the flower. I was very happy, and I thought that the magnolia flower was happy also, because when people recognize your presence and appreciate your presence, you feel that you are worth something. Of course, the magnolia flowers were very, very precious to me.

Sometimes I look at the full moon with mindfulness, I practice breathing in and out, and I tell the full moon the mantra: “Full moon, beautiful full moon, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” And I was really happy at that moment. I was a free person—I was not assailed by worries or fear or any projects. And because I was free, I was myself. I had the time and opportunity to touch the wonders of life around me, and that is why I could touch the full moon and I practiced the mantra with the full moon. This afternoon you might like to practice the mantra with somebody, or just practice the mantra with a tree or a butterfly, because they are all wonderful.

We are in the meditation hall and all of us can hear the sound of the rain. To me the sound of the rain is something wonderful. In the Upper Hamlet we have a veranda baptized the “listening-to-the-rain” veranda. If you are a free person you only need to sit there and listen to the rain, and you can be very happy already, because the rain is something wonderful. I very often think of the rain as bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. After several weeks without rain, the vegetation begins to suffer and when the rain comes you can see that all the trees and bushes are very happy. I think they enjoy the sound of the rain, as I do, very much. Sitting in the meditation hall or sitting in the “listen-to-the-rain” veranda, you can appreciate the sound of the rain and you can be very happy just sitting there.

So happiness is possible with mindfulness, because mindfulness helps us to realize what is there—so precious. Those of us who still have a mother, we should be happy. Those of us who still have a father, we should be happy. Those of us who still have eyes in good condition to be able to look at the moon, we should be happy. There are many things that can make us happy now. And that is the practice of mindfulness—namely, the practice of Buddhist meditation. So please write down the second mantra on another sheet of paper in your best handwriting, and decorate it with colors—with flowers, fruits, leaves, birds, and so on, and hang it in your room. I am certain that if you practice the first and the second mantra, you will make many people around you very happy. And don’t tell me that the practice is difficult—it is not.

[Bell]

The third mantra is also easy to practice. You practice this mantra when you see that the person you love suffers. She is crying, or he is crying. Or if they are not crying, they look very unhappy. If you claim to be a lover, then you have to know what is happening to the person you love, and mindfulness helps you to notice that something is wrong within that person. Of course, if you are there one hundred percent for him or for her, you will notice very soon that the person you love suffers. If you don’t know that the person you love suffers, you are not mindful; you are not an ideal lover, because there is no mindfulness in you. Those of us who claim to be true lovers should practice mindfulness, we have to practice meditation,

because how can you love if you are not there? You can only love when you are there and in order to be there you have to practice being there, whether by mindful breathing or mindful walking, or any kind of practice that can help you to be really there, as a free person, for the person you love. So because you are there, you are mindful—that is why you noticed that the person you love suffers. Right in that moment you have to practice deeply, to be there one hundred percent. You go to him or to her, and you pronounce the third mantra, “Darling, I know you suffer, that’s why I am here for you.”

When you suffer, you want the person you love to be aware of your suffering—that’s very human, that’s very natural. You suffer, and if the other person you love does not know that you suffer, if he ignores your suffering, you suffer much more. So it would be a great relief if the person we love knows, is aware, that we are suffering. Therefore your task, your practice as a lover is to come to him or her to offer your true presence and utter the third mantra, “Darling, I know you suffer, that is why I am here for you.” Before you can do anything to help, she suffers less already, because she knows that you are aware of her suffering. So the effect of the practice is instantaneous—quicker than if you make instant coffee—very quick. The more you are concentrated, the more you are mindfulness, the greater will be the effect of your practice. And children can practice this very well. Every time they see their brother or their sister suffer, every time they see Mommy crying, they should learn how to practice. They have to practice breathing in and out deeply and go to that person and take his hand or her hand and say, “Darling, I know you suffer and I’m here for you, really, I’m here for you.” This a great relief.

The fourth mantra is only for adults because it’s a little bit complicated. This third mantra, also, I would like you to write down in English, Italian, or German in your best writing style—calligraphy—and you should decorate it with a lot of love and care. Make it into a masterpiece. And don’t wait until you are home to make it—I am asking you now to write down the three mantras here and decorate them very beautifully. When you go home, put them on the wall of your room or maybe in the living room—it’s up to you. But my expectation is that you be able to practice them. And this is not the practice of children alone, this is the practice of everyone. Even if she is seventy or eighty, she still can practice; even if he is eighty he still can practice them and this can make a lot of happiness in the house. You try a few weeks, and you’ll see—the situation in the home will be transformed very drastically. Communication is restored. We are concerned with the happiness and the sorrow and the suffering of every other member in the family. And of course this practice is easy, simple, and everyone can do it.

Now when you hear the small bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell—children leave]

In the time of the Buddha there was a lay person whose name was Anathapindika. His real name was Sudatta. Anathapindika was a name given to him by the people in the city because they loved him. He had a good heart. He was a rich tradesman, business man, but he spent a lot of his time and money taking care of poor people, people who were abandoned, children, orphans, and so on. That is why the title “Anathapindika” was given to him by the people of his city Shravasti—it means “the person who takes care of the isolated ones, the unhappy ones,” and so on. It was he who invited the Buddha to come and teach in his country. The Buddha before that stayed in the country of Magadha.

Anathapindika during one of his trips to Magadha found out about the presence of the Buddha. He was very greatly inspired by the teaching of the Buddha, that is why he invited the Buddha to his country, Kosala. And it is he who purchased the most beautiful park close to the city of Shravasti and offered it to the Buddha as a monastery—the first monastery in that country. Later on, it was called the Jeta Park, because the owner of the park had been the prince, whose name was Jeta. Anathapindika took great pleasure in serving the Buddha and the Sangha, and his family was a happy family because his wife and all the three children followed the teaching of the Buddha. But he was not given all the teachings of the Buddha, because at that time people thought that lay people were too busy and should receive only the kind of teachings they could afford to do. So the deepest kind of teachings were only given to monks and nuns. It was Anathapindika who made it clear to the monks and nuns that there were lay people who were very capable of practicing the deepest teachings of the Buddha, and he said, “Please, Venerables, go back and tell the Lord that there are many lay people who are too busy and who cannot afford to learn and practice the deeper teaching of the Buddha, but there are among lay people those who are very capable of learning the practice and these teachings.”

Anathapindika was very sick, he was about to die—this was after serving the Buddha for about thirty years. The Buddha went to him and visited with him, and after that he charged the Venerable Shariputra—one of his best disciples—to take care of Anathapindika. And one day Shariputra learned that Anathapindika was extremely sick—he might pass away at any time—so he went to the room of his younger brother in the Dharma, the Venerable Ananda, and asked him to come along for a visit. So both of them went to the house of Anathapindika.

When Anathapindika saw both of them coming, he was very glad. He tried to sit up but he was too weak; he could not. Shariputra said, “My friend, just remain where you are. You don’t have to try hard to sit up, we will bring a few chairs and sit next to you.” And after having said that, Shariputra asked, “Dear friend, Anathapindika, how do you feel in your body? Is the pain in your body increasing or decreasing?” And Anathapindika said, “Venerables, the pain in me is increasing all the time; I suffer very much, it does not decrease.” And when Shariputra heard that he said, “Why don’t we practice meditation on the Three Jewels? Let us practice breathing in and out and focus our attention on the wonderful Buddha, the wonderful Dharma, and the wonderful Sangha.” And he offered guided meditation to Anathapindika and both of the monks also sat there and practiced together with the lay person who was dying. So, two monks supported a lay person practicing in this very crucial moment.

Shariputra was an extremely intelligent person. He was like the right hand of the Buddha, taking care of the community of monks, teaching many of them as a big brother, and he knew exactly what the dying Anathapindika needed. So he offered first of all meditation on the Three Jewels, because he knew very well that the greatest joy of Anathapindika was to serve the Buddha and the Sangha. He did everything to make the Buddha comfortable and the Sangha comfortable. Therefore meditating on the Buddha, on the Sangha, would bring joy and happiness that would counterbalance the pain in the body. All of us have to learn this, because in us there are seeds of suffering, there are seeds of joy. If you know how to touch the seeds of joy, they will be watered and the energy of happiness and joy will be strong enough to counterbalance—to make the person suffer less.

The Buddha is the one who has the capacity of being there, of being mindful, of being understanding, of being able to love and accept, of being joyful. There are the ten titles of the

Buddha that people would repeat in order to touch those qualities—the joy and the peace of the Buddha.

After meditating on the Buddha, they meditated on the Dharma. The Dharma is a path that can bring relief and joy and peace to us right away—we don't need to wait. The Dharma is not a promise of happiness in the future. The practice of the Dharma is not a matter of time—as soon as you embrace the Dharma and practice, you begin to get relief and transformation right away.

And the Sangha is composed of members who practice concentration, mindfulness, wisdom, joy, and peace. To let your mind touch these wonderful jewels—that can water the seed of happiness in you. After about ten minutes of practicing like that, Anathapindika felt much better already.

Next time when you sit close to a dying person, you might like to practice this same way. You are there, present one hundred percent, with stability, solidity, and peace. This is very important. You are the support of that dying person, and he or she needs very much your stability, your peace. To accompany a dying person, you need to be your best—don't wait until that moment to practice. You practice in your daily life to cultivate your peace, your solidity. Then you look into the person and you recognize the seeds of happiness that are buried deep in him or her, and you just water these seeds. Everyone has seeds of happiness. We should know in advance. And at that moment you talk to him or to her, you use guided meditation, in order to help him or her touch the seeds of happiness within him or her.

Several years ago I was on my way to lead a retreat in the northern part of New York state, and I learned that our friend Alfred Hassler was dying in a Catholic hospital nearby. So we managed to stop and spend some time with him. Alfred was very active during the Vietnam war. He was director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in New York, and he supported us wholeheartedly in bringing the message of peace from the Vietnamese people, and he worked very hard to get a cease-fire and a negotiation between the warring parties. He was dying there, and I and Sister Chân Không and about six or seven of us were in a limousine, and we arranged so that we could stop. Only Sister Chân Không and I were allowed to go in; the rest were waiting in the car. When we arrived, Alfred was in a coma and Laura, his daughter, was trying to call him back, “Alfred, Alfred, Thầy is here, Sister Chân Không is here!” But he didn't come back.

I asked Sister Chân Không to sing him a song—the song was written by me and the words are taken directly from the *Samyutta Nikaya*: “These eyes are not me, I am not caught in these eyes. I am life without boundaries, I have never been born, I will never die. Look at me, smile to me, take my hand. We say goodbye now, but we'll see each other right after now. And we'll meet each other on every walk of life.”

Sister Chân Không began to sing softly that song. You might think that if Alfred was in a coma, he could not hear. But you must not be too sure, because after singing two or three times softly like that, Alfred came back to himself—he woke up. So you can talk to a person who is in a coma. Don't be discouraged, talk to him or to her as if he is awake. There is a way of communicating.

We were very happy that he recovered his consciousness and Laura said, “Alfred, you know that Thầy is here with you, Sister Chân Không is here with you.” Alfred was not able to speak. He was fed with glucose and things like that. He could not say any word, but his eyes

proved that he was aware that we were there. I massaged his feet and I asked whether he was aware of the touch of my massage. When Laura asked, his eyes responded that he was aware that I was massaging his feet. When you are dying, you may have a very vague feeling of your body; you don't know whether exactly your body is there. So if someone rubs or massages your arms or feet, that will help, that will reestablish a kind of contact and awareness that the body is still there.

Sister Chân Không began to practice exactly like Shariputra; she began to water the seeds of happiness in Alfred. Although Alfred had not spent his time serving the Buddha, the Sangha, he had spent a lot of his time working for peace. So Sister Chân Không was watering the seeds of peace work in him. “Alfred do you remember the time you were in Saigon and were waiting to see the superior monk Tri Quang? Because of the American bombing, Tri Quang was not willing to see any Westerners. And you had a letter from Thầy and you wanted to deliver it to Tri Quang? You were not allowed to get in, so you sat down, outside his door, and you slipped under his door a message that you were going to observe a fast until the door was opened, and you did not have to wait long because just ten minutes after that, Tri Quang opened his door and invited you in? Do you remember that, Alfred?” And she tried to refresh the memories of these happy events.

“Alfred, do you remember that event in Rome where three hundred Catholic monks were demonstrating for peace in Vietnam? Each of them wore the name of a Buddhist monk in prison in Vietnam—because these Buddhist monks refused to be drafted into the army and obey the law of the army. Over here we tried our best to make their suffering known. So in Rome, three hundred Catholic priests wearing the names of three hundred Buddhist monks in jail in Vietnam made a parade, do you remember that?” All these kinds of memories came back to him.

Sister Chân Không continued to practice, exactly like Shariputra. At one point, Alfred opened his mouth and spoke. He said, “Wonderful, wonderful,” two times, and that is all. One or two minutes later he sunk again into his coma and never came back again. Six people were waiting in the limousine and that night we had to give an orientation talk to four or five hundred retreatants, so I recommended to Laura and to Dorothy, his wife, that if he came back, they should continue the same kind of practice: massaging and watering the seeds of happiness in him. And we left.

[Bell]

In the early morning of the next day we got a telephone call that Alfred died very peacefully, just one hour or an hour and a half after we had left. It looks like he was waiting for us, and after that kind of meeting he was completely satisfied and he died in peace.

When Sister Chân Không's big sister was dying in California, she was suffering a lot in her body. In the hospital she was in a coma, but she suffered very much in her body; and she cried and she shouted, and all her children did not know what to do, because they had not learned anything from the Dharma yet. When Sister Chân Không came in and saw that, she began to chant. But her chanting was a little bit too weak compared with the moaning and crying of the person who was dying. So Sister Chân Không used a cassette recorder and a tape of the kind of chanting that you heard this morning, “Namo Avalokiteshvaraya, bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.” She used an earphone and she turned the volume quite high. In just a few minutes, all the agitation, all the suffering, all the crying stopped, and from that moment until she died, she remained very quiet.

It was like a miracle, and all of her children did not understand why, but we understand. Because she also had the seed of the Buddha-dharma in her, she had heard the chanting, she had had contact with the practice—the chanting, the atmosphere of the practice. But because of having lived too many years in an environment where the atmosphere of calm, of peace, was not available, many layers of suffering had covered it up, and now the chanting helped her although she was in a coma. The sound broke through and helped her touch what was deep in her. Because of that miracle of linking with the seed of peace and calm within her, she was able to quiet all her agitation and crying and she stayed very calm until she died.

So every one of us has that kind of seed in us—seeds of happiness, seeds of peace and calm. If we know how to touch them, we can help a dying person to die peacefully. We have to be our best during that time—we have to be calm, solid, peaceful, and present in order to help a person dying. The Buddhist practice of touching the Ultimate should be practiced in our daily life—we should not wait until we are about to die in order to practice. Because if we know how to practice touching deeply the phenomenal world in our daily life, we are able to touch the world of the Absolute, the ultimate dimension of reality in our daily life. When you drink your cup of tea, when you look at the full moon, when you hold the hand of a baby, or walk with a child, if you do it very deeply, mindfully, with concentration, you are able to touch the ultimate dimension of reality, and this is the cream of the Buddhist teaching—touching the Ultimate.

The other day we talked about the wave, living the life of a wave, but at the same time she can also live the life of water within her. She does not have to die in order to become water, because the wave is water already in the present moment. Each of us has our ultimate dimension—you may call it “the kingdom of God,” or *nirvana*, or anything. But that is our ultimate dimension—the ultimate dimension of our reality. If in our daily life we live superficially, we cannot touch it. But if we learn how to live our daily life deeply, we’ll be able to touch nirvana—the world of no birth and no death—right in the here and the now. That is the secret of the practice that can help us transcend the fear of birth and death.

After having guided Anathapindika to practice watering the seeds of happiness in him, the Venerable Shariputra continued with the practice of looking deeply: “Dear friend Anathapindika, now it is the time to practice the meditation on the six sense bases. Breathe in and practice with me, breathe out and practice with me. These eyes are not me, I am not caught in these eyes. This body is not me, I am not caught in this body. I am life without boundaries. The decaying of this body does not mean the end of me. I am not limited to this body.”

So they continued to practice, in order to abandon the idea that we are this body, we are these eyes, we are this nose, we are this tongue, we are this mind. They meditated also on the objects of the six senses: “Forms are not me, sounds are not me, smells are not me, tastes are not me, contacts with the body are not me; I am not caught in these contacts with the body. These thoughts are not me, these notions are not me, I am not caught in these thoughts and in these notions.” And they meditated on the six consciousnesses: sight, hearing, consciousness based on nose, consciousness based on tongue, consciousness based on body, consciousness based on mind: “I am not caught in consciousness based on the body. I am not caught in consciousness based on the mind.”

Then they meditated on the six elements: “The element of earth in me is not me, I am not caught in the earth element. The element of water in me is not me, I am not caught in the element of water.” Then they went on with the elements of air, space, fire, and consciousness.

Finally they came to the meditation of being and non-being, coming and going. “Dear friend Anathapindika, everything that is arises because of causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart.”

When we look at this sheet of paper, you might think that there is a moment when the sheet of paper began to be and there will be a moment when this sheet of paper will stop being. We think that before we were born we did not exist, and we think that after we die we might become nothing. Because in our mind we have the idea that to be born means “from nothing we suddenly become something.” From no one you suddenly become someone—that is our notion of birth. But how is it possible that from nothing something could become something, from no one they could become someone? That is very absurd.

Look at this sheet of paper—we may think that the moment of its birth is when the paste was made into this sheet of paper. But this sheet of paper was not born out of nothing! If we look deeply into this piece of paper, we see already that it had been there before its “birth” in the form of a tree, in the form of water, in the form of sunshine, because with the practice of looking deeply we can see the forest, the earth, the sunshine, the rain—everything in there. So the so-called “birthday” of the sheet of paper is only a “continuation day.” The sheet of paper had been there for a long time in various forms. The “birth” of the sheet of paper is only a continuation. We should not be fooled by the appearance. We know that the sheet of paper has never been born, really. It has been there, because the sheet of paper has not come from nothing. From nothing, you suddenly become something? From no one, you suddenly become someone? That is very absurd. Nothing can be like that.

So the day of our birth is only a continuation day and practicing meditation is to look deeply into ourselves to see our true nature. That means, our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. No birth is our true nature. We used to think that to be born means from nothing we become something. That idea, that notion is wrong, because you cannot demonstrate that fact. Not only this sheet of paper, but that flower, this book, this thermos, they were something else before they were “born.” So nothing is born from nothing. The French scientist Lavoisier said, “*Rien ne se crée,*” nothing is produced. There is no birth. The scientist is not a teacher of Buddhism, but he made a sentence exactly with the same kind of words that are found in the Heart Sutra. “*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd,*” nothing is produced, nothing dies.

Let us try to burn this sheet of paper to see whether we can reduce it into nothing. Maybe you have a match or something? Be mindful and observe. . . . We know that it is impossible to reduce anything into nothing. You have noticed the smoke that came up. Where is it now? Part of the sheet of paper has become smoke, it has joined a cloud. We may see it again tomorrow in the form of a raindrop. That’s the true nature of the sheet of paper. It is very hard for us to catch the coming and the going of a sheet of paper. We recognize that part of the paper is still there, somewhere in the sky in the form of a little cloud. So we can say, “So long, goodbye, see you again tomorrow.”

It’s hot when I burn it—I got a lot of heat on my fingers. The heat that was produced by the burning has penetrated into my body and into yours also. It has come into the cosmos, and if you have a very sophisticated instrument, you can measure the effect of that heat on everything, even several kilometers from here. So that is another direction where the sheet of paper has gone. It is still there, in us and around us. We don’t need a long time to see it again. It may be already in our blood. And this ash, the young monk may return it to the soil and maybe next year when you try a piece of lettuce, it is the continuation of this ash.

So it is clear that you cannot reduce anything to nothing, and yet we continue to think that to die means from something you become nothing, from someone you just become no one. Is it possible? So the statement, "*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd,*" nothing is really born, nothing can die, goes perfectly with the teaching of the Buddha on the nature of no birth, and no death. Our fear is born from notions—the notions of being and non-being, the notions of birth and death. Before we were born we are taught that that was "non-being," after we are born we believe that that is "being," and after we die we think that that will be "non-being" again. So not only do the notions of birth and death imprison us in our fear but the notions of being and non-being have to be transcended. That is the cream of the Buddhist teaching—to silence all the notions and ideas, including notions of birth and death, being and non-being.

What is Nirvana? Nirvana is the blowing out of all notions, the notions that serve as the foundation of fear and suffering. The other day we were dealing with the notion of happiness. Even the notion of happiness can make us miserable, can create a lot of misery for us. That is one of the notions that should be transcended. There are basic notions that are the foundation of our fear and suffering: the notions of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going. From where have you come and where shall we go? The idea of coming and going is also a notion that we have to transcend.

[Bell]

This is the guided meditation given to Anathapindika by Shariputra: Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die. No birth and no death. Not to arrive and not to depart. No coming, no going. When the body arises, it arises; it does not come from anywhere. When the body ceases, it ceases; it does not go anywhere. The body is not nonexistent before it arises. The body is not existent after it arises. When conditions are sufficient there is a manifestation, and if you perceive that manifestation, you qualify it as being. If conditions are no longer sufficient, you cannot perceive it, and you qualify it as non-being. You are caught in these two notions.

It's like if you come to Plum Village in April and you look, you see no sunflowers. Looking around you say that there are no sunflowers around here. That is not true. The sunflower seeds have been sown. Everything is ready by that time. Only the farmers and their friends, when they look at the hills around Plum Village, already can see sunflowers. But you are not used to it—you have to wait until the month of July in order to recognize, to perceive sunflowers. So if out of your perception, you qualify it as "being" or "non-being"—well, you miss the reality. Not being perceived by you doesn't make it non-being, nonexistent. Just because you can perceive it, doesn't mean that you can qualify it as existing and being. It is a matter of causes and conditions. If conditions are sufficient, then it is apparent, and you can perceive it; and because of that, you say that it "is."

That is why, in deep meditation, we have to transcend all these ideas, all these notions, and we can see what other people cannot see. Looking into the flower you can see the garbage, you can see the cloud, you can see the soil, you can see the sunshine. Without much effort, you can see that a flower "inter-is" with everything else, including the sunshine and the cloud. We know that if we take away the sunshine or the cloud, the flower will be impossible. The flower is there because conditions are sufficient for it to be; we perceive it and we say, "Flower exists." And when these conditions have not come together, and you don't perceive it, and then you say, "It's not there." So we are caught by our notions of being and non-being.

The ultimate dimension of our reality cannot be expressed in terms of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going.

It is like the water that is the substance of the waves. Talking about the wave, you can speak of the “birth” of a wave, the “death” of a wave. The wave can be “high” or “low,” “this” or “other,” “more” or “less” beautiful: but all these notions and terms cannot be applied to water, because the water is the other dimension of the waves. So the ultimate dimension of our reality is in us, and if we can touch it, we’ll transcend the fear of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going. For Buddhist meditators, “to be or not to be,” that is *not* the question! Because they are capable of touching the reality of no birth and no death; no being, no non-being. You have to transcend both concepts—being and non-being—because these concepts constitute the foundation of your fear.

It would be a pity if we practiced only to get the relative kind of relief. The greatest relief is possible only when you touch nirvana. Nirvana means the ultimate dimension of our being, in which there is no birth, no death, no being, no non-being. All these notions are entirely removed. That is why nirvana means “extinction”—the extinction of all notions and concepts, and also the extinction of all suffering that is born from these concepts, like fear, like worries. When we begin to touch the phenomenal world, we see there is birth, there is death, there is impermanence, there is no-self. But as we begin to touch profoundly the world of phenomena, we find out that the base of everything is nirvana. Not only are things impermanent, but they are permanent as well. You transcend the idea of permanence, and you also transcend the idea of impermanence. Impermanence is given as an antidote so that you can release your notion of permanence. And since you are caught by the idea of self, no-self is a device to help you to get release from the notion of self. Touching the Absolute, not only can you release the notion of self, but you can also release the notion of non-self. If you have a notion of nirvana, please do your best to release it as soon as possible—because nirvana is the release of all notions, including the notion of nirvana!

Anathapindika was a very able practitioner. When he practiced to this point, he was so moved that he got insight right away. He was able to touch the dimension of no-birth and no-death. He was released from the idea that he is this body. He released the notions of birth and death, the notions of being and non-being, and suddenly he got the non-fear. The Venerable Ananda saw him crying because of happiness, because of that kind of release. But Ananda did not understand what was really happening with the lay person Anathapindika, so he said, “Why, dear friend, why are you crying? Do you regret something, or did you fail in your practice of the meditation?” He was very concerned. But Anathapindika said, “Lord Ananda, I don’t regret anything. I practiced very successfully.” Then Ananda asked, “Why are you crying, then?” Anathapindika said, “Venerable Ananda, I cry because I am so moved. I have served the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for more than thirty years, and yet I have not received any teaching that is deep like today. I am so happy to have received and practiced this teaching.” And Ananda said, “Dear friend, this kind of teaching we monks and nuns will receive every day.”

You know that Ananda was much younger than Shariputra. Thereupon Anathapindika said, “Venerable Ananda, please go home and tell the Lord that there are lay people who are so busy that they cannot receive this kind of deep teaching, but there are those of us, although lay people, who do have the time, the intelligence, and the capacity of receiving this kind of teaching and practice.” And those were the last words uttered by the lay person Anathapindika. The Venerable Ananda promised to go back to the Jeta grove and report that

to the Buddha, and it is reported in the sutra that not long after the departure of the two monks, the layman Anathapindika died peacefully and happy.

This is a sutra, a discourse called “The Teachings to be Given to the Sick.” You can find it in the *Plum Village Chanting Book*, in English. We are working on a new version of the *Plum Village Chanting Book*, but in the present edition you already have this text. This text is available in Pali, in Chinese, and we have several other texts which offer the same kind of teaching. So I would recommend that we study this text and we do a Dharma discussion in order to deepen our understanding of the teaching, and how to put into practice this teaching of the Buddha in the best way possible.

If you are a psychotherapist, if you are a social worker, if you are the one who has to help a dying person, it’s very crucial that you study this kind of teaching and put it into your practice in your daily life. And if you are simply a meditator who would like to deepen your practice, then the study and practice of this sutra will help you to get more stability, get more peace, and especially the ground of non-fear, so that when the moment comes, you can confront it in a very calm and easy way—because all of us are supposed to die some day. Even if theoretically in the teaching there is no birth and no death, if we are able to live our daily life in such a way that we could touch the ultimate dimension, then that moment will not be a problem for us at all.

In my daily life I always practice looking at things around me, at people around me, at myself; and I can already see my continuation in this flower, or that bush, or that young monk, or that young nun or that young lay person. I see that we belong to the same reality, we are doing our best as a Sangha, we bring the seeds of the Dharma a little bit everywhere, we make people around us happy: so I don’t see the reason why I have to die, because I can see myself in you, in other people, in many generations. That is why I have promised the children that I will be climbing the hill of the twenty-first century with them.

From the top of the hill in the year 2050, I’ll be looking down and enjoying what is there together with the young people now. The young monk Phap Canh is now twenty-one, and on the top of the hill he will be seventy-five! And of course I will be with him, hand in hand, and we will look down together to see the landscape of the twenty-first century. So as a Sangha, we shall climb the hill of the twenty-first century together. We’ll do our best so that the climbing will be enjoyable and peaceful, and we’ll have all the children with us because we know that we never die. We will be there for them forever

Suffering Can Teach Us

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 13, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends, today is the 13th of August, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English.

The other day after I spoke about the practice of the four mantras. I said that the fourth mantra is more difficult, so I did not talk about it. In fact it is difficult, but not so difficult. After the Dharma talk, when we were about to do walking meditation, there was a gentleman who stopped me on my way and asked me about the fourth mantra. He was very eager to learn and to practice the fourth mantra. He was very curious, because I had said that the fourth mantra is more difficult. But after that I thought it over, and I thought that the children are able to understand and practice the fourth mantra, also. So today I am going to tell them how to practice the fourth mantra.

You need to practice the fourth mantra when you yourself suffer. Remember, the third mantra is to be practiced when the person you love suffers. You only need to go to him or to her with mindfulness, concentration, and you just proclaim the mantra: "Darling, I know you suffer. That is why I am here for you." But this fourth mantra is practiced when you yourself suffer. You believe your suffering has been caused by the person you love the most. That is why it is so difficult. When the person you love so much says something or does something that hurts you, you suffer quite a lot. Because if it were another person who said something or did something, you would not suffer that much. But this is the person you love most in the world, and he just did that to you, he just said that to you. That is why you cannot bear it. You suffer one hundred times more. This is when the fourth mantra has to be practiced.

According to this practice, you have to go to that person, that very person, the person you love the most, who just hurt you very deeply. You go to him or to her with full awareness, with full mindfulness and concentration, and you utter the fourth mantra: "Darling, I suffer, please help." This is quite difficult. But if you train yourself, you can do so. When you suffer and you believe that the person who makes you suffer is the person you love the most, you want to be alone. You want to lock your room, and cry alone. You don't want to see him or her. You don't want to talk to him or to her. You don't want to be touched by him or her. Leave me alone! You don't want him or her to touch you. This is very normal. It's very human also. Even if the other person tries to approach and to reconcile, you are still very angry. You say: "Don't touch me. Leave me alone. I don't want to see you, to be with you." That's the real feeling at that moment. Very difficult. I think that you have had that experience.

So is it possible to practice the fourth mantra? You go to him or her, and breathing in deeply, out deeply, become yourself one hundred percent and just open your mouth and say with all your might, your concentration, that you suffer and you need her help, his help. It seems that you don't want to do so, because you don't feel that you need his help or her help. You may need the help of all other people, but you don't need his help. You want to be independent. "I don't need you." That's what you want to say. That is the trouble; because you are deeply hurt. That's why you cannot go to him and to her and ask for help. Your pride is deeply hurt. And that is why the fourth mantra is so important.

In order to be able to practice this, we have to train ourselves for some time. Your natural tendency is to tell him or her that you can survive without him or her. You can be independent. You will not die because you lack his or her love. That is a natural tendency. But if you know how to look at the situation with wisdom, you see that this is a very, very unwise thing to do. Very stupid thing to do. Because when we love each other, we need each other, especially when we suffer. It would be unwise to do the opposite. You are very sure that your suffering comes from him or her; you are so sure. But maybe you are wrong. She has not done that, she has not said that, in order to hurt you, but you misunderstand. You have a wrong perception. Wrong perception is the word.

I am going to tell you the story of Mr. Truong. It is a true story. It happened in my country many hundreds years ago. The people in my country all know about this story. There was a young man who was drafted into the army, so he had to go to the army and go to war. He had to leave his young wife home alone, pregnant. They cried quite a lot when they had to separate from each other. And they didn't know whether the man would come back alive, because no one knows. To go to war is very risky. You may die in just a few weeks, or in a few months, or you may get badly wounded. Or if you have a lot of luck, you will survive the war and go home to your parents, your wife, your children.

The young man was lucky enough; he survived. A few years later, he was released from the army. His wife was so happy to learn the news that her husband was coming home. She went to the gate of the village to welcome her husband, and she was accompanied by her little boy. The little boy was born while his daddy was in the army. So the moment when they met each other again, they cried and embraced each other and there were tears of joy. They were very grateful that the young man had survived and come home. It was the first time he saw his little boy.

According to tradition, we have to make an offering on the altar of the ancestors, to announce to ancestors that the family is reunified. He told his wife to go to the marketplace and buy flowers, fruits, and other provisions to make an offering to be placed on the altar. He took the little boy home, and he tried to persuade the little boy to call him daddy, but the little boy refused. "Mister, you are not my daddy. My daddy is another person. He used to come to visit us every night, and every time he came my mother would talk to him a lot, for a long time, and my mother used to cry and cry; and when my mother sits down, my daddy also sits down; when my mother lies down, he also lies down; so you are not my daddy."

The young father was very sad, very hurt. He imagined another man coming to his home every night and spending the night with his wife. All his happiness vanished just like that. Happiness was very short, followed by unhappiness. The young father suffered so much that his heart became a block of stone or ice. He could no longer smile. He became very silent. He suffered very deeply. His wife, shopping, did not know anything about it. So when she came home, she was very surprised. He did not look at her anymore. He did not talk to her anymore. He kept very cold, like he despised her. She did not understand. Why? She began to suffer herself, suffer deeply.

When the offering had been made, she placed it on the altar. Her husband burned the incense, prayed to the ancestors, spread the mat, made the four prostrations and announced that he was home, safe, with his family. You know, in my country, this is a very important practice. In every home, there is an altar for ancestors. On the altar you put the picture of one ancestor that represents all the ancestors. Maybe that is the grandma or the grandpa, and so on. Each morning, someone would come to the altar, wipe away the dust that had gathered on

the table, light a stick of incense and bow, and offer that to all the ancestors. This is a very simple, but important practice every morning. So you always have incense sticks in the home.

Every time you come to the altar and light a stick of incense, you touch your ancestors. Touching your ancestors is a very deep practice. I don't know whether our Western friends would like to practice this way, but if they do, they will have the chance to touch their ancestors every morning. Spiritual ancestors like Jesus, Buddha, the patriarchs, and the teachers. Blood ancestors like grandpa, great grandpa, great grandma, and so on. In Vietnam, this is a very popular practice. Every morning you light a stick of incense. You offer it to your spiritual ancestors and blood ancestors. You breathe in and out, and you touch your ancestors. This is very important, because if you get cut off from your ancestors, you will get sick, like a tree without roots. So I just propose this to you, to see whether it makes sense to set up a family ancestral altar in a European home or in a North American home.

Maybe this practice can help us to get healthier, and bring harmony back into the family. Every time there is something happening in the family, you have to go and announce to your ancestors. This is our practice. It has been there for many thousands of years. If your little girl or little boy gets a strong fever, of course you need to ask a doctor to come and help, but you have to announce this to your ancestors. You have to light a stick of incense, come to the altar, offer it, breathe in and breathe out, and you have to announce to your ancestors that the little girl, the little boy, is has a fever. You have the duty of announcing this to your ancestors because they have the right to know, because that is their great, great granddaughter or son. If you are about to send your son to college, you also have to announce that to your ancestors. They have the right to know. Or if you are about to marry your daughter to someone in the next town, you have to announce that to your ancestors. That is the practice. That is why when the young man came home to be reunified with his family, they had to prepare an offering to be placed on the altar and announce that kind of return to the ancestors.

After having offered incense, prayed and made four prostrations, the young father rolled up the mat and did not allow his wife to do the same, because he thought that his wife was not qualified to present herself in front of the ancestral altar. The young woman felt very ashamed—humiliated—because of that, and she suffered even more deeply. According to the tradition, after the ceremony has ended, they have to bring the offering down, and the family has to sit down and enjoy the meal with joy and happiness; but the young man did not do so. After the offering, he just left the house, went into the village, and spent his time in a liquor shop. The young man got drunk because he could not bear the suffering. In the old times, when they suffered so much, they used to go to the liquor shop and drink a lot of alcohol. Nowadays, people can use many kinds of drugs, but in the olden time alcohol was the only thing. He did not go home until very late, something like one or two o'clock in the morning, and he went home very drunk. He repeated that for many days: never talked to his wife, never looked at her, never ate at home, and the young lady suffered so much she could not bear it. On the fourth day, she jumped into the river and she died. She suffered very much. He also suffered very much. But no one was thinking of coming to the other person and asking for help, because pride—you have to call it by its true name, pride—was an obstacle.

When you suffer, and you believe that your suffering has been caused by the person you love the most, you prefer to suffer alone. Pride prevents you going to the other person and asking for help. What if the husband had come to her? The situation might be very different. That night, he had to stay home because his wife was already dead, to take care of the little boy. He had to search for the kerosene lamp and he had to light it up. When the lamp was lighted up, suddenly the little boy shouted: “Here comes my father!” So he pointed to the shadow of his

father on the wall. “You know, mister, my father used to come every night like this and my mother used to talk to him a lot and she cried a lot with him, and every time she sat down, my father also sat down. Every time my mother lay down, he also lay down.”

It turns out that his “father” was only the shadow of his mother. In fact, she used to talk to that shadow every night, because she missed her husband so much. One day the little boy had asked her: “Everyone in the village has a father, why don’t I have one?” So that night, in order to calm the little boy, she pointed to her shadow on the wall, and said, “Here is your father!” and she began to talk to the shadow. “My dear husband, you have been away for too long. How could I alone bring up our child? Please come back as soon as possible.” That’s the kind of talking she used to do. And of course, when she got tired, she sat down, and the shadow would sit down. Now the young father began to understand. A wrong perception was wiped away. But it was too late; the wife was already dead.

A wrong perception can be the cause of a lot of suffering, and all of us are subjected to our wrong perceptions every day. That is what the Buddha said. We live with wrong perceptions every day. That is what the Buddha said. That is why we have to practice meditation and look deeply into the nature of our perceptions. Whenever we perceive anything, we have to ask the question, “Are you sure your perception is right?” To be safe, you have to ask, “Are you sure of your perceptions?”

When we stand there with friends, and look at the beautiful sunset, we enjoy the beautiful sunset, and we may be sure that the sun is setting, or has not set. But a scientist may tell us that the sun has already set eight minutes ago. The image of the sun we are touching is only the image of the sun eight minutes ago. He is telling the truth. Because it takes eight minutes for the image of the sun to come to us—that is the speed of light. We are very sure that we are seeing the sun in the present moment. That is one of the wrong perceptions. We are subjected to thousands of wrong perceptions like that in our daily life. It may be that the other person did not have the intention to hurt you, yet you believe that she has done that in order to punish you, to make you suffer, to destroy you. You carry with you a wrong perception like that, day and night, and you suffer terribly. Maybe you keep your perception until you die, with a lot of hatred toward a person who may be innocent. That is why meditating on perception is a very important practice.

What if the young man had gone to his wife and asked: “Darling, I have suffered so much in the last few days. I don’t think I can survive. Please help me. Please tell me who is that person who used to come every night, and that you talked cried to a lot, and every time you sat down he would sit down.” A very simple thing to do. Go to her and ask. If he had done so, the young lady would have had a chance to explain, and the tragedy would have ended. They would have recovered their happiness so easily, the direct way. But he did not do so because he was so deeply hurt, and pride has prevented him from going to her and asking for help. He had not learned the fourth mantra.

If the man committed that mistake, the woman also committed the same mistake. She also suffered so deeply, but was too proud to ask. She should have gone to him and asked: “Darling, I don’t understand. I suffer very much. I don’t understand why you don’t look at me, you don’t talk to me, you seem to despise me. You seem to feel that I am not there at all. Have I done anything wrong to deserve that kind of treatment?” That’s what she had to do. “Darling, I suffer. Please help.” That is the mantra. If she had done so, the young man, the young husband would have answered like this: “Why? Don’t you know why? Who is that

person who used to come every night, and you talked to him?” Then she would have had the chance to explain.

You know, after the young man found out his mistake, he cried and cried and cried. He pulled his hair. He beat his chest. But it was too late! Finally all the people in the village learned of the tragedy, they came and organized a big ceremony to pray for the poor lady. A ceremony of wiping out injustice committed by people like us, out of our ignorance and wrong perceptions. Together they built a shrine for her. That shrine still stands there. If you visit North Vietnam, going by that river you see that shrine.

We all have to learn from the suffering of the young couple. We should not make the same mistake. Next time, when you suffer, if you believe that your suffering has been caused by the person you love the most, you have to remember this story. You have to be very careful. You have to learn now to train yourself, to prepare for that time. In that moment, you'll be able to practice the fourth mantra. Practice walking meditation. Practice sitting meditation. Practice breathing in and out mindfully to restore yourself. Then you go to him or to her and you practice the mantra. “Darling, I suffer so much. You are the person I love most in the world. Please help me.” Without pride. If you let your pride stand in between you and her or him, it means that your love is not really true love, because in true love there is no room for pride. If pride is still there, you know that you have to practice in order to transform your love into true love. The children are young, they have plenty of chance to learn and train themselves for the practice. I am confident that even if you are still young, if you get the teaching and if you practice right now, it will be very easy for you to practice later on, when you suffer because you think that the person you love the most has done that to you, has said that to you. I don't think that you are going to use the fourth mantra often, but it is a very important mantra. Maybe you have to use it only once a year, or twice a year, but it is extremely important. So I want you to write it down, and keep it somewhere. And every time you suffer very much, please go and look for that mantra, and try to practice it.

The other day, in the New Hamlet, I was asked by a friend about the meaning of the meditation on the image of Jesus on the cross. What is the meaning of that kind of practice, contemplating the image of Jesus on the cross? At first I thought the question should be addressed to teachers in the tradition. We have often heard that when you contemplate the image of Jesus dying on the cross, you remember the fact that Jesus suffered and died for us. In the Buddhist study and practice concerning suffering, we know that suffering can teach us, we can learn a lot from suffering. If we look deeply into the nature of suffering, we may get insight on how we can get out of our situation. That is why suffering, *dukkha*, has been called in Buddhism a holy truth. Suffering is holy, because the contemplation of suffering can bring about insight on how to get out of suffering and transform it.

If you do not know how to make use of suffering, if you do not know how to learn from the suffering, then suffering cannot be a holy truth. We can sink into the ocean of suffering, we can be overwhelmed by suffering, and suffering is not a holy truth; it is only something destructive. That is why contemplating on suffering is a very important practice in Buddhism. Contemplating suffering, you will know how that suffering has come to be, because everything is born from conditions. And the contemplation on the nature of suffering will bring us insight on how that suffering has come to be, and the conditions that have brought this suffering to us.

Suppose we have a depression. We have to live with that depression right now. We may ask whether we are able to get out of that depression, make it go away, and the Buddha said yes. If you look deeply into the nature of your depression, you would know how it has come to

you. You will look back and see how you have lived your life in the last six months or so, you will find out how that depression has come. When you have insight, you just decide not to feed your depression in the way you have done during the last six months. Then your depression will have to die or go away for lack of food, because everything needs food to survive, including your depression.

If I were to contemplate the suffering that Jesus underwent on the cross, I would ask whether Jesus bears his suffering, the injustice that was forced on him, well. In this summer opening we have had a few Dharma talks on the topic of forbearance. We have learned that if our heart is big, and if we have a lot of peace and joy and love then it would not be difficult at all for us to bear some injustice that people inflict on us. But if we are full of pain, suffering, anger, hatred, then it will be very difficult for us to accept the injustice people inflict on us. So I would find out whether Jesus bears the injustice that was inflicted on him well, whether in his heart there was anger or hatred, whether he is trying to teach us how to learn from our suffering. The image of Jesus dying on the cross may be very instructive, very helpful to us.

But I also got a new insight. It was during a visit to Monbos that I made with a few young monks and nuns. We went into the church in Monbos, not very far from here, and we sat there for half an hour. During the time I sat there I contemplated Jesus on the cross, and I had the vision that Jesus should be presented in other forms, not only on the cross. We learned that Jesus had gone to the mountain and practiced meditation alone. During that time he spent on the mountain he may have been practicing walking meditation or sitting meditation. Our friends have to depict him in a sitting position or in walking meditation, radiating peace and stability. An artist within the church has to come forward and bring us these images of Jesus that convey stability, solidity, calm, peace, tolerance. That's what we need. That's what the young people in the church need.

Young people are looking for something like stability, like tolerance, like understanding, like love. Maybe they don't need to contemplate a lot the image of Jesus dying on the cross, but they need a very refreshing image of Jesus Christ, doing walking meditation or sitting meditation or holding children and playing with children. I really think so. Now people are attracted to the image of the Buddha, because the Buddha was sitting in a very solid, calm way, radiating peace and happiness, a half-smile on his lips. That is what we are very hungry for. We are very hungry for stability, for peace, for solidity, for tranquility. Anyone living in our time will feel that. That's what we need the most. And therefore the young people, when they go to church, they should be able to touch these elements embodied by the clergy and by the images, especially the image of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was young when he died, but not many people have tried to present him as having joy, vitality, peace. Jesus had a great vitality within himself. It was very active during the years of his teaching. He encountered many, many people. He helped so many people. And you know that when you are able to do something for people you get a lot of joy, of peace, of stability. That is why I try to speak for the young people. We need the image of Jesus smiling, sitting, walking, embodying the joy, the peace, the tranquility, the love. The young people need that image very much.

Also, during that question and answer session, there was one question about the necessity of expressing our emotions and anger. The friend who asked me that question began by saying that if he tries to be calm, his child continues to be nervous, but if he begins to shout then his child gets quiet and calm. I did not have the chance to address his question, this approach. I only told him "Well, you shout, and then your little boy gets calm and doesn't disturb you

anymore, and you believe that it works. But if you look deeply into it, maybe it would not work in the future. Because by shouting like that, your child may get an internal formation, a wound within himself. And later on maybe communication between you and him will become difficult.” So we cannot say that it works. It may work for one moment, but it may cause damage in the future.

I said that “when you shout, your shouting may come from love or might come from irritation. There is a difference.” When you shout with irritation in you, that will create some negative things in you and also in your child. You have to measure the consequence of that. You cannot say that because you shout like that he accepts to become calm for a moment and you think it's a good way to proceed. There are many cases where a son or daughter cannot communicate to a father. Communication is just impossible, because maybe the father has been using his authority a little bit too much. The father has to learn how to deal with the little boy or the little girl as a friend. He needs to practice forbearance, patience. He needs to practice loving-kindness even with his little boy or little girl. He needs to learn how to manage his irritation, his anger. A lot of tragedy has resulted from the way fathers and mothers deal with their children.

When there is a fight between parents and children, the losers are very often the children, because the children don't have the right to respond to their parents the way their parents do. They cannot use the same kind of language or reaction, because they are at the mercy of their parents—financially and in every aspect they have to depend on their parents. That is why, when their parents express their anger, the children have to receive the violence and they have no means to get it out—to express it, to transform it. If the parents don't know how to transform their violence, then the children will not know how to transform theirs either, because they have not learned anything from their parents. When children have become victims of the violence brought on them by parents, they suffer, and they don't know what to do. That violence within them becomes a poison that continues to kill them. If these young people try to kill themselves, it's mostly because they want to retaliate against their parents. By killing themselves, they want to send a message to their parents: “You know, I am killing myself because of you. You have made me suffer so much, and this is the fruit of your behavior, your way of dealing with me.” So when a young man or young woman commits suicide, there is always that kind of message directed to parents or society or someone else, because the violence in him or her has no way to be transformed.

[Bell]

Most of us who sit here, we are at the same time children and parents. Even if we are still young, we can be already a big sister or a big brother, and already have to play the role of a parent. That is why we have to learn how to be children and to be parents at the same time. We have to learn how to manage, how to take care of the violence in us. The energy of violence, the energy of hatred and anger in us, is something that continues to destroy us, to shape our behavior. That is why we have to learn the practice of how to handle that negative energy and how to transform it. In the Buddhist teachings, it is clear that the practice of compassion and loving-kindness is the only antidote to violence, hatred, and anger. We have learned that compassion and loving-kindness cannot just be born like that, they need the practice in order to be born. That is the kind of energy that should be fabricated by us.

The practice of generating that kind of energy that can transform violence and hatred in us is the practice of looking deeply. Only the practice of looking deeply can bring about acceptance and understanding and love. When you practice breathing in on your cushion and visualize

that you are a five-year-old boy or a five-year-old girl, and invite that little boy or little girl to be with you, you might touch that little boy or little girl in you with compassion, because that little boy or girl did suffer during your time of childhood. Your father at some point may have shouted at you, believing that shouting was the best way to keep you calm. He did not know that shouting like that could open up a wound within your little heart. The heart of little boy, five years old, is very tender, very vulnerable. Parents should be aware of these things. When you look at your little boy with a stern look, that is enough to scare him, to create terror in him, and to create a wound within his tender heart. For you, it's very normal that a father when irritated can shout and can look at his boy with such kind of eyes, but for a little boy of five years old, that may be too much. For a little girl five years old that may be too much.

So breathing in, I see myself as a five-year-old girl or five-year-old boy. And during the whole time of your in-breath, you allow that little boy or little girl to come back. He is still alive in you. I am sure. I know. The little girl, the little boy, is still alive very much, with very much the same kind of need and suffering. When he is there, she is there, you have to embrace him or her in your mindfulness. You have to say: "Darling, I know you are still there, and I am here for you." The first mantra, the second mantra. Breathing out, I smile to that little boy who was me. That smile is already the smile of compassion. Because when you breathe in, you see yourself as a five-year-old boy or girl, very vulnerable, very fragile. That is why when you breath out, your heart is already filled with compassion, and you embrace that little boy or little girl with your energy of compassion. There is already understanding.

Mindfulness of breathing revives an image, helps you to look deeply into that image, and helps you to generate the energy of compassion with which you embrace him or her. That is very healing, and you may continue this for some time, maybe ten, fifteen minutes.

I have in my hut a picture of me taken when I was sixteen and a half, a young novice. Every time I look at that, I still feel a lot of compassion. He did not know his path yet. He didn't know what difficulties were waiting for him, because I underwent a lot of difficulties, sufferings. So if you want to practice, you may like to use your family album, you may need a picture of you when you were five or four, and you generate compassion for yourself.

There was a young man who came to the Upper Hamlet, I think about eight or ten years ago, who was given that kind of practice because he hated his father. He could not bear the thought of thinking and writing a letter to his father. At that time all the monks and nuns and lay people received the assignment of writing a letter, a love letter, to his or her father or mother. For him, to write a letter to his mommy might be possible, but not to his daddy. Although his daddy already had passed away, he still could not reconcile with him. He just could not think of his father. He considered his father as the main source of his suffering. There are many men and women like that around us.

During the week that followed, I gave him the other half of the exercise: "Breathing in, I see my father as a five-year-old boy. Breathing out, I smile to that five-year-old boy that my father was." Maybe you have not had a chance to see your father as a little boy, but before he became an adult, he was a little boy. Very fragile. Very vulnerable, also. Suddenly, that fragile image of your father comes to you, and you see that he's no different from you. He was also as vulnerable as you, as fragile as you. He may be a victim of your grandpa. Every time his father shouted at him, every time his father looked at him with a stern look, he got a wound in his heart, just like you. He did not know how to transform that, so he was repeating the same kind of thing with you.

That's what we call the wheel of *samsara*, the vicious circle transmitted from father to son, from son to grandson. The violence we received, we don't know how to transform, and even if we hate our father, if we promised ourselves that when we grow up we will do entirely differently from our father, we will repeat the same. We will do exactly the way our father has done to us. That is the wheel of *samsara*.

I have seen many young men who are very determined that they will do the opposite of their father. But when they grow up, get married, and have children, they do exactly the same. The whole habit energy, the transmission, the *samsara*. So if you are touched by the Dharma, you have an instrument to cut through the wheel of *samsara*, you end the *samsara*, and you will not transmit that violence to the next generation.

“Breathing in, I see my father as a five-year-old boy. Breathing out, I smile to my father as a five-year-old boy.” Vulnerable. Fragile. Fearful. That is the practice of looking deeply, because when you look like that, you see that the other person suffers like you, is also a victim like you. Suddenly the nectar of compassion is born in your heart. Suddenly you feel that you can breathe in and out again. The image of your father is no longer the same. He is now a little boy with a lot of suffering, a lot of fear, a lot of wounds within himself. You have suffered, that is why you can understand the suffering of someone else, and that someone else is your father.

Fathers always have the tendency to love and make their children happy. That tendency is deep, it is natural. But because they have not learned the way to love properly, the way to handle their violence and anger, they have not been able to express their true love, and they have inflicted a lot of suffering on their children. We cannot say that there is no love in them, we can only say that the love in them has no way to be expressed. If we can begin to understand this, our heart will begin to open, and suddenly we can breathe and we can survive, because a drop of the nectar of compassion is already born in our heart. We no longer want to blame, because we have touched his or her suffering. We know that he does not need punishment, he needs help.

During his lifetime, no one has been able to help him, to transform his violence and his anger. He has not had a teacher, a Dharma brother or sister; and if I had not had a teacher, a brother or sister in the Dharma, I would have done like him, you see. So no blaming is possible now. Only compassion is the answer. So suddenly, you are on your cushion, and you feel that you can breathe, you can survive. And you can continue to practice. “Breathing in, I see my father as a suffering child. Breathing out, I embrace my father with my compassionate smile.” This is very healing, very nourishing.

The young man placed on his table a picture of his father. He had asked for a picture of his father to be sent from America. He placed that on his desk. Every time he went out of his room he stopped by the door, looked into his father's eyes, and began to breathe in and out and visualize his father as a little boy. Every time he went into his room, he turned on the light on the table, looked at that picture, and practiced breathing in and out. A few weeks later, he was able to sit down and write a letter, the assignment. We call it a love letter, the first love letter. And he succeeded in writing the letter. Writing a letter like that untied a lot of bondage in him, because of the nectar of compassion that had been born in his heart. Your heart suddenly expands, there is now a lot of space, and now you can bear the injustice quite easily because you have an amount of understanding, of compassion that can digest, that can transform.

So the practice of looking deeply is the practice of expanding the heart, of putting more space and compassion into our heart. Bodhisattvas who have to bear a lot of injustice don't have any hatred or anger in their heart. That is why they accept, they digest, injustice and suffering very quickly. In the Christian gospel you read: "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing." They are doing that out of their ignorance. That is also good meditation, a good practice of looking deeply.

When the little boy held the two wings of the butterfly in two hands and tore the butterfly apart, he didn't know what he was doing to the butterfly. He needs someone to tell him and to help him. I told him: "My dear, don't you know that tonight the father and the mother of the butterfly will have to spend the whole night waiting for the butterfly to come home? Don't you think that your parents would worry if you didn't come home tonight? Please be kind to the butterfly." The child understood right away. The next day when it was raining hard and a lot of snails were coming out on the path, he was picking up these snails with me and putting them back in the bush, saying we had to be careful, otherwise the snails could not go back to their parents that night.

So people are doing you injustice, are doing awful things to you and the people around. They may think that doing that is good. They don't know what they are doing. They do it out of ignorance. And hatred, anger, jealousy, all these things are born from ignorance. That is what the Buddha said. So practicing looking deeply is to bring the kind of insight that will help us to understand, to accept, to love, to be compassionate.

[Bell]

When we have the energy of compassion in us, we can relate to the world very easily, because it is exactly that kind of energy that helps us to get out of our prison of loneliness. The people who have no compassion within their heart, they are very alone, because they have no ways to relate to other living beings. Having the energy of compassion in you, you are already a happy person. Every time you can do something to help another living being, the joy always returns to you. The teaching of love in Buddhism is quite clear. And also very deep.

Our love is there for the other person or persons. But according to this teaching, you have to practice looking deeply into the nature of your love. And you can always improve the nature of your love. There are kinds of love that bring us a lot of sorrow, a lot of jealousy, a lot of hatred, a lot of suffering, because they are not true love. True love within the Buddhist teachings has to contain the element of loving-kindness. *Maitri* is loving-kindness and loving-kindness is the capacity of offering happiness. This is the process of learning, because to make the other person happy, you need to be there. You need to learn how to look at him or her. You need to learn how to talk to him or to her. Making another person happy is an art that we have to learn. It's not because we bring him or her a lot of money that we can make him or her happy, but the way we live, the freshness we have, the tolerance we have. You are just there by his side or her side, and the other person enjoys your presence, enjoys your company, because your person contains loving-kindness, radiates loving-kindness. And whatever you do can bring him or her a lot of happiness. The word you say, a look you direct to that person, is enough to make him or her very happy.

According to the practice, you have to understand the real needs of that person, and again you have to practice looking deeply. If you do not know what the other person really needs, you will not be able to offer him or her happiness. And if you don't have time, how can you look deeply into the other person? So take time, practice looking deeply into him or her, and see

what kind of needs she has or he has, and just bring him or bring her the things they need. Maybe what they need is not a lot: your attention, your capacity of listening to him or to her, your capacity of talking to her in a nice way. Well, these things are very important, and maybe they just need these things to be really happy. You know that you can train yourself in order to be able to offer these kind of joys and happiness.

The second element of true love is compassion, *karuna*. That is the capacity of removing the pain, transforming the pain in the person you love. Again, you have to practice looking deeply to see what kind of suffering that person has in him or her. Again, you see that you need to be really there in order to see. Your presence is necessary. Then, if you are mindful, you will know that the person you love suffers, and with some amount of looking deeply, you can identify the suffering in him or her. If you can look a little bit more deeply, you see the nature and the cause of that suffering. Only then can you practice compassion, *karuna*. If you don't show that you understand that suffering, then you cannot practice *karuna*. You have to really understand that suffering, and sometimes you can stop the suffering just by the way you behave, talk, and act.

Maybe you are the cause of that suffering. You have no capacity to listen deeply to that person. You have no capacity of talking to him or her in a calm and loving way; therefore, you cannot understand his or her suffering. Now, if you are able to train yourself and to practice loving speech and compassionate listening, you might by yourself transform the suffering in her or in him. That is true in most cases. That person might confront easily the other difficulties in life if she is supported by you, she is understood by you, she feels that you are on her side. That is compassion and compassion is the fruit of meditation, looking deeply.

The third element of true love is joy, *mudita*. There are those who love each other, but who cry every day, who make each other cry every day. It means that their love is not true love yet, because the element of joy is not there. True love must bring you joy and happiness, and not sorrow every day. If your love is possessive love, you may behave like a tyrant, a dictator, so you make the person you love suffer every day, you make each other suffer every day, because of your narrow ideas of happiness, your wrong perceptions. That is why your love is not true love yet. The practice of looking deeply will help you to be less possessive, more understanding, and therefore you can offer the other person joy every day. I have seen true love. I have seen people loving each other and offering each other joy every day, maybe every hour, every minute. It is not difficult. It is not difficult. With some mindfulness, with concentration, with some training, you can do that.

The fourth and last element of true love is freedom, equanimity. If by loving, by being in love, you feel that you are losing your freedom, you have no space to move anymore, that's not true love. That is why in true love you have to offer yourself and the other person space and freedom. You know that when you arrange flowers, you should allow each flower to have some space around it in order for the flower to radiate its beauty. A person is also a flower. If he is deprived of freedom, and then he will not feel happy; therefore love in such a way that you can retain your freedom and that person also can retain her or his freedom. And this is possible.

There is a poem that I like about the moon. The refreshing moon, beautiful moon, is sailing through the ocean of the sky. The Buddha is the full moon that goes across the immense sky. If the river is calm, then the image of the moon will be reflected clearly in the river. Something like that. The image I like is the full moon traveling in the sky. You feel the freedom of the moon, because the moon has a lot of space around her. And the moon can

benefit many people, can bring a lot of happiness to many people. It shines on everyone. It does not discriminate. It shines on the mountain and on the rivers. On this side of the frontier, on the other side of the frontier. That is equanimity. No discrimination. True love is *upeksa*, non-discrimination, and therefore no dictatorship.

All in one, One in All.

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 11, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends, today is the 11th of August 1997, and we are in the upper hamlet of Plum Village. I guess that everyone here has seen the lotus pond in the lower hamlet. Yesterday I conducted a walking meditation to the lotus pond, and then we went to the plum trees. It was very nice. We enjoyed the lotus and we also enjoyed the plum trees. Many of you were not there. But it looked like Paradise, it was Paradise, and it still is available. Later, you will realize that the lotus pond is not only in the lower hamlet, but in your heart. When you go home to your town and to your house, and every time you sit down quietly and you focus your attention on the lotus pond and the lotus pond will be born again from within you.

Our mind has all kinds of seeds in it. You have a seed of the lotus pond within you. Every time you use your mindfulness and you touch the seed of the lotus pond in you, you can see the lotus pond with all these flowers and big leaves like this. You don't have to go to the lower hamlet to really have the lotus pond. You may ask the question "Where has the lotus pond come from?" I will tell you.

Today I have my pebble bag, but instead of having six pebbles, I have something else in it. My bag is full of lotus seeds. And all the lotuses in the lower hamlet came from a tiny seed like this. We just begin with one seed. Can you look into this seed and see the whole lotus pond and hundreds of lotus flowers and lotus leaves? Can you imagine that all the lotuses and all the leaves of the lotuses come from this tiny little seed? Yet this is true. I'll tell you how to make this lotus seed into a lotus pond. It's easy. Please listen, because I'm going to offer each of you one lotus seed, so that when you go home, you'll be able to make a lotus pond.

You know that a lotus seed has to be planted in mud with water because it does not grow well in dry soil. You think that this seed can be just put into the mud and you can wait until it sprouts, but it will not sprout if you just put it in the mud, because the lotus seed is made of a kernel inside and also a very hard skin outside. Even if you leave the lotus seed three weeks or five weeks or ten weeks within the mud, it will not sprout, even if the mud is full of water. I know that there are lotuses that remain alive for more than one thousand years, and after one thousand years we plant it, it can still grow into a lotus plant.

So you should know how to help the lotus seed to sprout. This is the secret: you have to help the water to penetrate into the lotus seed. You may use a little knife, a little saw, and you cut just a little bit, about half a millimeter, so that the water has a chance to penetrate into the lotus and about four or five days later, the lotus seed will sprout and become a tiny lotus plant. If you hold a lotus seed like this and you rap it against a rock for one minute, this part of the skin of the lotus will be removed, so that that spot of the lotus skin will allow the water to get in, and five days after, it will sprout. You will see very tiny lotus leaves and the lotus leaves can get as big as this cup. You keep it in your yard if it is in the spring or summer or autumn, but when it is cold, you bring it into your house. It will continue to grow, and when spring comes you can bring it out, and you can change the container into a bigger one, and the lotus plant will become bigger and bigger. In one year you will begin to have a few lotus flowers, and in three years you will have a lotus pond as big as the one in the lower hamlet, and if you

want it can be ten times bigger. Do you think that you can do it? You can make a lotus pond as big as this.

I will offer each child in this assembly one lotus seed, and I trust that you will keep it well and bring it home to make that experiment. You will learn that a huge lotus pond is contained within this. Ancestors of the lotus have transmitted all the talents, all the fragrance, all the beauties in this tiny seed, and if this seed knows how to practice, it will manifest all this talent, all these beauties, all these wonders from within it, and offer themselves to the world.

Each of you is a seed, a wonderful seed like a seed of lotus. You look a little bit bigger than a lotus seed, but you are a wonderful seed. In you there are a lot of talents. Compassion is in you. Understanding is in you. Love is in you. The capacity to smile is in you, the capacity to help other people be happy is in you. Because these wonderful virtues, these wonderful qualities, have been transmitted to you by your ancestors, your blood ancestors and your spiritual ancestors. If you know how to sprout and to grow, you will be a very beautiful lotus pond and you will offer a lot of happiness to many, many people around you, not only people, but animals, plants and minerals. A tiny lotus seed can make so many people happy. It has made me happy. A television man from Paris came to Plum Village and he saw some lotus flowers, and he reported on French television that lotus flowers bloom like mushrooms in Plum Village.

We have so many kinds of wonderful seeds within us, and if we know how to help the seeds to sprout, we'll be very happy and we'll be able to offer a lot of happiness to so many people. We already have a lot of good seeds in us, and we continue to receive seeds. When I look at you with loving eyes, and with the eyes of trust and admiration, a good seed is planted in you. I help plant a seed of faith, of confidence, of compassion in you, just by looking at you with the eyes of love and compassion. And we can help each other by planting the positive and beautiful seeds in each other. Every sound you hear can be a seed, a good seed or a negative seed. Every sight you see can be received as a seed in yourself, a positive seed or a negative seed. That is why in Plum Village we try our best to maintain a place where you can only see positive sights and positive sounds. In fact, Plum Village is a sanctuary of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We come together here and try to protect the environment so that we will not see things that are not the dharma. We will not hear anything that is not the dharma. Everything translates the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that is why while you are in Plum Village you are safe. Every sight, every sound, every face, every touch should contain the dharma in it, and you are protected by the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

I know in America, in Europe, there are national parks where animals are protected. There are sanctuaries for animals, and you are not allowed to go in and shoot a deer or a rabbit. They are safe. So Plum Village is a kind of sanctuary like that where the Five Mindfulness Trainings are protected. If anyone shoots one of these precepts down, we have to tell him, to ask him, to leave, because we don't want the precepts shot down in our territory. We can do that only with the collaboration of everyone. The Five Mindfulness Trainings practiced by the whole sangha will transform this place into a sanctuary where everyone is safe. There is no sound, there is no sight, there is no touch that can create negative seeds in us. If we train ourselves well in Plum Village, we will go home and transform our home into a sanctuary also.

We use our television, we use our telephone, we use our kitchen in such a way that the mindfulness trainings can be kept alive all the time and we do that for the world, we do that for our family, we do that for ourselves. This is the teaching. So the lotus seed is here, in my

two fingers, but it is there, in your heart, and you yourself are a wonderful seed and you should take care of yourself and we should be able to help you take care of yourself, so that one day you may sprout into a wonderful lotus pond, and you will make happiness for so many people. I think I have here enough lotus seed for each young person. Will you come each of you and receive one lotus seed? Maybe you would like to keep it in your pebble meditation bag. I will ask only two persons to come and I will ask Sister Gina to take care of distributing to each one of you one seed. OK. A young gentleman and a young lady?

Please breathe in and breathe out.

[Pause for one minute while distributing seeds.]

[To the young people:] When you hear the small bell, stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

We have the habit of seeing things not inside of each other, but in Buddhist meditation we are advised to learn how to look at things, so that we can see things within each other. Usually we think that the lotus pond is outside of the lotus seed, and the lotus seed is outside of the lotus pond. But in fact, if we practice looking deeply, you realize that the lotus seed is in the lotus pond, but at the same time the lotus pond is in the lotus seed. When you look at your daddy, you may think that your daddy is outside you and you are outside your daddy. But if you look more closely, you will see that your daddy is not really outside. He is inside you, and you are inside your daddy.

When we were small, in the womb of our mother, there was a link between us and our mother called the umbilical cord. We were attached to our mother. We were a kind of one with our mother. Our mother breathed for us, ate for us, worried for us, drank for us, and smoked for us. [Laughter] So everything our mother did, we did because we were really one with our mother. When we were born, when we got out, they cut the umbilical cord and slowly we had the idea that our mother was different from us. But in fact, we continued to have that very close link with our mother. If our mother was not here, how could I be? So the umbilical cord, although you don't see it, still is there and we have to learn to look at the umbilical cord that is always there within us and our mother, and our grandmother, our grandfather, our ancestors.

You can touch it now. Since you are there, they are there, and they are not somewhere else. They are within you and you can touch them, because this hand is your hand, but of course it is also the hand of your mother. Remember when you had a fever as a child, you did not want to eat anything, drink anything, you suffered. And suddenly your mother came and put a hand on your forehead. You felt so good, and sometimes you wish that you still had that hand, that wonderful hand with you available at any time you suffer. But in fact, that hand is still available, because this is her hand. If you just breathe in and out and realize that this is also her hand, because your hand is a continuation of your mother's hand. You breathe in and you put it on your forehead, and then you have it again available. So the umbilical cord is always there, as ever.

And if you look more closely you will see that between you and a cloud floating in the sky there is also an umbilical cord, because without the cloud floating in the sky you would have no water in your body. And if you look at the sun, there is an umbilical cord linking you with

the sun, because without the sun there would be light, no heat, no warmth, and no food, no washed vegetables. You can see that the sun is a kind of father, a kind of mother.

Driving through the countryside of France in the summer, I look at the cows, I look at the hay, I look at the nice fields. I feel closely connected. I see the hay as the milk, the yogurt I eat in the morning, also the cornfield. I see the link between everything. The cow is a mother to me. You drink the milk from the cow, you have an umbilical cord between you and the cow, and the sunflower and the hay. To meditate means to train yourself to look in such a way, to see the nature of interconnectedness of everything. One day you will see that the idea of outside and inside are just ideas. Everything is inside. The one is the many. The British nuclear physicist David Bohm said that it seems that there are two kinds of order, the explicate order and the implicate order. These are two words invented by him. In the explicate order, everything seems to exist outside of everything else, like a flower is outside of the table, the flower is outside of the earth, is outside of the wind, of the cloud. Flower is not cloud, flower is not earth, flower is only flower. That is the way we used to look at things, and that world is called the explicate order. But if you look more deeply, you enter into the implicate order, where everything is in everything else.

In the teaching of the Buddha there are also two terms that are equivalent: *lokadhatu* and *dharmadhatu*. Lokadhatu is the world and dharmadhatu is also the world, but in lokadhatu it seems that everything is outside of everything else. You are not I, I am not you. You are not your father; your father is not you. But if you live deeply and you touch deeply, you will touch the dharmadhatu where everything is in everything else.

The Buddha's teachings on the interconnectedness of everything, of the nature of interbeing of everything, are found in a very beautiful way in a sutra called the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The Avatamsaka Sutra is like a giant poem because it speaks in terms of image only. If you like poetry, you can enjoy the Avatamsaka Sutra and you can understand the Avatamsaka Sutra very easily. In the Avatamsaka Sutra you are invited to visit the dharmadhatu, the land of bliss, the land of no sorrow. If you don't mind being yourself, body and mind together, and making only one step you can enter in the dharmadatu, the kingdom of God. In the dharmadhatu there is a lot of light. That is why you can see things much more clearly. We need light in order for us not to be blinded by ignorance. Every being in the Avatamsaka world, in the dharmadhatu world, emits light from his or her body. When you enter that realm of bliss, you meet all kinds of people, animals, plants, and minerals, just like in this world. Imagine there are also businessmen, there are policemen, there are carpenters, there are teachers, there are students, there are little ones, there are old ones. We have every type of person in the Avatamsaka world, and each one of them emits light, the light of mindfulness. When they walk, when they sit, when they smile, they emit light, and you risk being struck by one beam emitted from them. And if you are struck by one light, you become mindful, and in turn you begin to emit light yourself. At first you step in and you are not very solid yet because you are not used to the dharmadhatu realm. But as you make three, four, five steps, you are struck by so many beams coming from everyone else, because when they walk, when they sit, when they smile, when they do things, they emit light, the light of mindfulness, and if you are struck by one beam of mindfulness, you yourself become mindful, and very soon you will emit light from your body. This you can do.

Think of Plum Village. When you step into Plum Village, you see everyone walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, speaking mindfully, and by doing so they emit the light of mindfulness. You realize that they are mindful and the beams of mindfulness strike you, and suddenly you become mindful, you stop running, and there you are walking mindfully, and in

your turn you send out beams that will strike other people who just come and they become mindful themselves. That is why it is described in the Avatamsaka Sutra that in the dharmadhatu world there is a lot of light. Not only buddhas, bodhisatvas, great beings emit light from their body, from their consciousness, but everyone, including the policeman, including the schoolteacher, including the carpenter, including the mason, including the farmer, and yourself.

The Avatamsaka world is available in the here and the now. There is so much light. Light is available, you can profit from the light. You yourself produce light to help the Avatamsaka realm to be more beautiful. In the Avatamsaka realm there is a lot of space. Space inside of you and space outside of you. Because when you enter the Avatamsaka realm you lay down all your worries, your projects in the future, you know how to dwell in the present moment and enjoy the light, enjoy the space that is offered by the realm.

So much space, so much freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from projects, freedom from the past, freedom from the futures, freedom even from the idea of how to be happy. There is so much space in the Avatamsaka realm. Everyone is free. Even the carpenter. He is not in a hurry. He does his job in a very relaxing way, singing. Building a house is a matter of a lifetime. After you build one house, you have to build another one. Why do you have to hurry? So carpenters are building houses in the most beautiful way possible. The houses are beautiful also, because they have been built in mindfulness, in concentration.

In the Avatamsaka realm, the cook, she cooks mindfully. She enjoys cooking, she enjoys washing the dishes. Every minute of the work brings her peace and joy. She does not need to run, to wish that the work would be over for her to be free. Her freedom is available while she is cooking. She is singing. She is looking at everyone else with the eyes of compassion. And she is emitting light, the light of freedom, the light of happiness, the light of mindfulness. She is happy because there is a lot of space within her. She has space to love. To embrace, because in her, blocks of worries, blocks of anxieties, blocks of fears have been let down. Because the light that has struck has helped her to lay down all this kind of luggage that is not very useful for her life or for her happiness. Look around her. A lot of space. No matter where she finds herself there is space. Hills, rivers, mountains, low lands, high lands are for her, she can enjoy every place. She feels like the moon traveling in empty sky. There is so much space around her.

The people who love her never want to lock her into a prison. Even the prison called love. The people who love her, the people around her allow her to be herself. And she allows people around her to be themselves, that is why all of them have space inside. And space outside. By loving each other, they offer each other space. They don't practice what we practice in the Lokadahtu: possessive love.

In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of time. You never run out of time. Time is for being alive. Time is not for other things. We know how to use time, we know how to enjoy time. Because time is light itself. Time over there is not money. Time is life. And there is no deadline. And because there is no deadline there is no stress. Freedom is what we have in the Avatamsaka world. Freedom is available. In the Avatamsaka world there are a lot of flowers. Looking at everything, we recognize it as a flower. Your hand is a flower. I remember saying, "Quiesce Que c'est Que l'automne? L'automne est une saison ou chaque feuille est une fleur (What is Autumn? Autumn is a season in which each leaf is a flower.) But in the Avatamsaka you don't have to wait till Autumn to see each leaf as a flower. You can see it as a flower in Spring. And what is wonderful is that a new flower contains all the flowers in it.

In the Avatamsaka there are a lot of lion seats where you can sit and you can feel like a lion, the king of the jungle. You feel like you are the king of yourself, the king of the Universe, you are not a slave, you are powerful, you have sovereignty over yourself. Every seat where you sit becomes a lion seat. The foot of the bodhi tree. You don't have to travel to the foot of the bodhi tree. Every time you sit in mindfulness, that seat becomes the foot of the bodhi tree. And when you are in the Avatamsaka you know that the Buddha is available.

Where is Shakyamuni? You want to go there and pay a visit. In the Avatamsaka everything is in everything else. India is in Japan, Japan in America. You don't have to move. It's wonderful. You need to be yourself, mindful, and you can touch your root teacher anytime. You don't have to travel.

Suppose we hear the New York Times announcing that the Buddha will be available for a walking meditation at the foot of the Gridhrakuta mountain in India next month. And whoever wants to sign up for a walking meditation with Shakyamuni is requested to do so because very soon there will not be any place on the airplanes. You love your teacher so much and you want to be with him and walking up and down the Gridhrakuta Mountain. You pick up your telephone and make a reservation on the plane so that you can arrive a few days earlier, you want to be sure. When you arrive you may get worried, there are so many people, thousands and thousands of people are flocking into the area, and you don't think that you are strong enough to push, push, push, and get close to the Buddha. Very frustrating! Your deepest wish is that you can get close to him, one meter, or if possible, a little bit closer, and someone can take a picture of you with the Buddha. So that when you go home, you can show people, "You see, I was with the Buddha." But in spite of all these efforts, you are not sure to be able to meet the Buddha and to have a walking meditation with the Buddha.

But in the Avatamsaka world you don't have to buy any ticket, you don't have to make any reservation. You just practice mindful breathing in and out. And when you look you see the Gridhrakuta mountain is right there, and the Buddha is right there and you just take his hand and you just walk and enjoy it. You don't even need to take a picture with him, because you are him, you are in him, and he is in you. Why do you need a picture of yourself?

In Plum Village I always see that it is beautiful. And if I can be completely satisfied walking here, I don't need to go the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The Buddha is here, available anytime. I don't complain that the Buddha lived two thousand six hundred years ago. No, I don't complain. Because I can touch him, to take his hand, and to practice walking meditation anytime. I don't have the need to take a camera, to make a reservation, to push, to come closer to the Buddha. And I am confident that you who have received the teaching can do the same, stay where you are and be happy.

We need only to be ourselves and to look a little bit deeply, and we are in the Avatamsaka realm. We see ourselves in each other, we see the past, the future, are in the present, and the present is in the past and the future. We become unlimited. Birth and death will not be able to bother us anymore. Because we have unlimited space, unlimited time. We transcend all kinds of borders. We are one with everything else.

In the Avatamsaka world, we'll meet a young person whose name is Sudhana. Sudhana is the disciple of a very illustrious teacher, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of great understanding. Sudhana is about thirteen or fourteen. He has practiced with his teacher, and his teacher taught him how to practice walking, sitting, and chanting. But his teacher is not a

closed teacher. He said maybe my young disciple can learn with other teachers as well. So he urged his young student to go out and learn with other teachers. He does not say you are forbidden to study with another teacher. So there is Sudhana going out by himself and learned from many teachers. He got to know fifty-three teachers and learned a lot from all. Among these teachers, there are children, there are non-Buddhists, there are women, there are men, there are old people, there are young people. All kinds of teachers. He does not mind learning from anyone.

One day Sudhana met Mr. Love. His name is Maitreya, the future Buddha, who is supposed to be with us now, by this time, to continue the work of Shakyamuni Buddha. Maitreya Buddha is supposed to be here with us, right now. *Maitri* means love, and Maitreya means Mr. Love. Maybe he is already here, but you don't recognize her. Because you have an idea of how a Buddha would look. Remove that idea, and you will meet Maitreya, Mr. Love, right here and right now. This teacher is always smiling, and so nice, so kind, so compassionate, so loving, that he takes the hand of Sudhana for a long walk, enjoying everything in the Avatamsaka world. And they come to a tower, a stupa, that is locked and Mr. Love says: "Dear young man, there are a lot of wonderful things within this tower. Would you like to go in and visit?" And Sudhana says, "Yes, why not?" Sudhana is very eager of learning, of seeing things, is very open. And you know, Sudhana is in yourself. And how to open the door of the Vairochana Tower? Vairochana is the name of the tower. Vairochana means the Buddha of the living Dharma.

Standing in front of the door, Mr. love practices breathing in and out, and knocks on the door, opens it, and sees that it is immense inside. A lot of space, only space. Suddenly there is no limit anymore, there is endless space, and inside there are trees, there are rivers, there are mountains, there are moons, there are galaxies. The Vairochana tower contains everything, and they enjoy visiting the mountains, rivers and galaxies in the Vairochana tower. Then they come to another tower, which is called Vairochana tower number two. And Mr. Love says, "Young man, do you want to go in and visit?" And he says why not? So they come to the tower, the door opens and there is endless space, endless time, countless galaxies, rivers and mountains, exactly like the first tower. And of course you know that inside there is another Vairochana tower, Vairochana tower number three. Look at this flower. It is like that. There is a flower within, and within that flower, there is another flower. Sudhana was so happy practicing with that teacher called Mr. Love.

Later, when they said good-bye, he met with another teacher who told him this: "You have to meet the mother of the Buddha because she is a wonderful teacher. Her name is Lady Mahamaya." "How can I meet her? Where should I go to have a chance to meet her?" And that teacher said, "You don't have to go anywhere, you just stay there, and if you know how to practice touching the earth, you'll see her."

You know, in Plum Village, we offer the practice of touching the earth. You come back to yourself entirely. You surrender yourself. You surrender your separate self. You become one with earth. And you use 100 per cent of yourself to touch the earth. And practicing like that seven days, suddenly Sudhana saw a huge lotus flower springing up from the earth. A lotus flower with one thousand petals. Right there in front of him. Suddenly he saw himself sitting on one of the petals of the lotus flower. It was wonderful. In no time at all, that petal of the lotus was transformed into a full lotus with one thousand petals. In one of the petals is the whole flower, with many petals, and in each petal of that second flower, there is also a whole flower. It is like the Vairochana palace. The lotus seed that I just offered to the child is like that. You can see in it the lotus pond, and in the lotus pond there is another seed, and if you

look into the lotus, you will see another lotus pond, to infinity. That is not something abstract. You yourself are a lotus seed. You contain all the cosmos, all the ancestors, all generations of children and grandchildren. Take good care of yourself. Touch yourself deeply.

Sudhana saw himself sitting on a full lotus with one thousand petals, and he just looked up and he saw Lady Mahamaya sitting on another lotus, looking down at him, smiling with compassion and love. Sudhana bowed to her, "Lady, honorable lady, I had been looking for you." There is a conversation between the two persons recorded in a chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra called "Entering the Inconceivable Realm." There is an English translation of the Avatamsaka available.

The conversation goes like this:

"Do you know something, young man? When I conceived Shidatta I was so happy. When Shidatta entered my womb, I was the happiest lady on earth. I felt that I had no more desire. I had a Buddha within me; what else do I want? I didn't have any other projects, I didn't have any other desires, and that is why I was so happy." A person without desire is a happy person because she has everything in her, the most valuable things in her. She doesn't have to run and to seek for them anymore.

Young man, do you know something? After Shidatta had gone into my womb, countless bodhisattvas, buddhas-to-be, came to me, and wanted to go in too, to see whether it was comfortable in there for their friend Shidatta. Countless bodhisattvas were there, and they wanted to get in, and before I could say anything, they all entered into my womb. And you know something, young man? If there were millions more who would have liked to go in, there was still space inside me."

That is the language of the Avatamsaka. The millions of bodhisattvas, if they want to go in and see whether Shidatta is comfortable in there, there is still plenty of space. In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of space inside as well as outside.

"You know something, young man? I am the mother of all Buddhas in the past, I am the mother of all Buddhas in the present, and I am the mother of all Buddhas in the future. You should know that. You should train yourself to look at me and to see that."

Sudhana learned a lot. Not only did he see that Lady Mahamaya is the mother of all Buddhas, but he looked into himself and he saw that he is the father of all Buddhas of the past, of the future, and of the present moment. And in Avatamsaka, all of us are pregnant with a Buddha inside. Whether you are a gentleman or a lady, you are pregnant with a Buddha inside, and you are happy. You don't try to look for anything else because you know that Buddha-nature is within you. You know that the Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God, according to the Gospels, is like a grain, a seed, a mustard seed, exactly the same kind of language. The Kingdom of God is contained in a mustard seed. If you know how to do, to take care of the mustard seed, the mustard seed will become a tree, and all the birds in the cosmos can come and take refuge. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Buddha realm, the Avatamsaka realm, is within you. You need only to touch it. All generations of ancestors are within you: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. Why do you want to look for the Buddha, for Jesus, somewhere else? God is not the old man in the sky. God is alive in you. The Kingdom of God is also in you; just touch and make it manifest. We may need a little bit of training, like the children who need to know how to handle the lotus seed in order for the lotus seed to become a lotus pond. You need a little bit of training, that's all.

[Bell]

In the Lotus Sutra it is taught by the Buddha that everyone has the *Buddhata*, Buddha-nature within, and you are a Buddha. There is a baby Buddha waiting in you and you might lead your daily life in such a way to allow the Buddha in you to bloom, like a lotus seed, to become a lotus pond. Before this teaching, many disciples of the Buddha thought that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha. The maximum you could be was a disciple of the Buddha, an arhat, someone who can transform entirely the afflictions and get free from all suffering, but that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha.

According to the Lotus Sutra, everyone is a Buddha to be, and the Buddha is available within, you can touch anytime. A Buddha is not limited in time and in space. You don't have to go anywhere to touch a Buddha. You just stay where you are, and the Buddha is available. The Buddha does not have to undergo birth and death. The Buddha is always alive, the living Buddha within. So don't think that the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu and entered mahaparnirvana in Kushinagara. That is only a manifested body of the Buddha. The true Buddha was not 2600 years ago only: the true Buddha you can touch in the here and the now. And while the Buddha was revealing the true nature of Buddha in everyone, suddenly there was a voice in space, calling "Wonderful, wonderful, Shakyamuni Buddha, you are preaching the Lotus Sutra to your assembly, wonderful, wonderful." And everyone looked up and saw a huge and beautiful stupa in the sky, decorated with all kinds of jewels, seven kinds of jewels. The very beautiful voice came from within the stupa, the tower, in the sky. Everyone was amazed. How could a stupa appear from the empty space like that, with a wonderful voice coming from within, and praising the Buddha Shakyamuni for giving that wonderful teaching about the Buddha nature. They turned toward their root teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, who was sitting on a rock on the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India, asking him with their eyes, and the Buddha smiled and said that is Prabhutaratna Buddha. He is sitting inside a stupa and he has been offering these words of praise for the Lotus Sutra. You know the Prabhutaratna Buddha has made a vow that everywhere in the cosmos, if there is a Buddha offering the teaching of the lotus about the nature of the Buddha he would come in the form of a stupa, and pronounce these words of praise. That is why today, since I am offering that wonderful teaching he is here to acknowledge it, and to praise me for offering you the teaching.

Everyone in the assembly wanted so badly to see the face of the Prabhutaratna Buddha; they look again at their root teacher and said, "how could we open the door of the stupa so that we could see the Prabhutaratna Buddha in person? We want to see him?" That's very human. All of us are like that: we want to see forms, to see the person who is praising our teacher. We love him because we love our teacher; therefore we love the one who is praising our teacher. That's very human.

The Buddha said, "It is not easy, my dear, because unless I can call back all my manifested bodies in the cosmos, I cannot open this door for eternity for you to see Prabhutaratna Buddha. You know something, you think I am the Buddha, I am the only Buddha, your teacher who is sitting here. In fact that is not true. I am everywhere, I am everywhere in the cosmos, and I am doing exactly the same thing as I do here. I have countless manifested bodies existing in every corner of the cosmos, and while I am teaching the Lotus Sutra here, countless manifested bodies of mine are offering at the same time the teaching on the lotus, and to open the door of the stupa, I have to summon, to call back all of my manifested bodies to be able to open this."

And everyone was looking at the Buddha pleading that he call back all his manifested bodies to be able to open the door for them to see with their own eyes the Buddha within. With a lot of compassion the Buddha wanted to do what seemed to be very difficult to do, for the love of his disciples he tried. He sent out a beam from his forehead, and that beam shot all around the cosmos, and suddenly they came. The assembly saw countless Shakyamuni Buddhas, they look like their teacher, they are coming from every direction, and suddenly space is filled with Shakyamuni Buddhas, countless of them. Now they realize that what they have thought to be their teacher is just a very small part of their teacher. Their teacher is not just a person of sixty kilograms sitting on the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The person of their teacher is huge, is the whole cosmos, existing everywhere in the whole cosmos. Now they have removed one idea of Buddha. They now begin to see their teacher in a different way. Their teacher cannot be just touched in time and space; their teacher has the kind of longevity that cannot be measured. Their teacher has the kind of presence that can be felt in every corner of the cosmos.

Then with all these manifested bodies, Shakyamuni made a gesture, and suddenly the door of the stupa opened. But still many people couldn't see it because everyone was sitting on the ground. Only the heavenly beings, great bodhisattvas who stay up in the air, could look and see the Buddha in the stupa. But all of us are still there, grounded to the floor of the Gridhrakuta Mountain and they could not see, and they again look at their teacher and plead for help. You have to be on the same level in order to see. If you stay where you are you cannot see: you have to go up to the same level to see it. Otherwise, the Buddha will have to bring it down to you, or bring you up to it.

The Buddha is made of a lot of compassion, and that is why Shakyamuni Buddha tried to help. With his magical power he lifted the whole assembly up, and now everyone could see Prabhutaratna Buddha sitting in the tower. Suddenly Prabhutaratna Buddha smiled and made room in his seat, and invited Shakyamuni Buddha to come and sit together with him, and there the two Buddhas sitting together, the Buddha of eternity, and the Buddha of time and space, they were sitting together to show the assembly that there are two levels. The Buddha manifested as a sight, and the Buddha as your true nature, they are one, they are always one. You should not discriminate.

It's a wonderful sutra. It speaks with images. Prabhutaratna Buddha is the Buddha of the cosmos, and Shakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of time and space, who appeared on earth for us as a teacher. Yet they are one. If you know to look deeply into Shakyamuni Buddha, you will see the Buddha of the cosmos, everywhere at any time, he is not limited to time and space, and therefore you don't have to go to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to meet him. You can stay right here, and he is available, because there are many manifested bodies of Shakyamuni in the world for you to see, to teach, to touch, and to learn from. If you know how to listen, the sound of the wind can be the teaching about the Four Noble Truths. If you know how to listen to the birds, the sound of the birds can be the teaching of the Eightfold Path. If you know how to contemplate the sunflowers, the sunflowers can reveal the Buddha-Land to you. It's right here, it's right now, the Buddha-Land, the Buddha, the Kingdom of God. You have to be alive to touch it, to live it. Don't waste your life running and looking somewhere else. It is right there.

If you know how to look, how to touch deeply, you will become birthless and deathless, because the nature of everything that is, is without birth and without death. You are in everything else, everything else is in you. Birth and death are just notions that scare us, and if you are able to remove the notions, you get the gift of nonfear, and only with nonfear can true happiness be possible.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra you read this gatha: "All things are birthless. All things have no extinction. You are also like that. If you know how to look at things this way, you can see and touch all Buddhas at any time." That is a four-line gatha in the Avatamsaka Sutra, in fact it is in the chapter on the Suyama Heaven.

There were so many bodhisattvas from the cosmos coming to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to listen to the dharma talk, and many of them offered to stay there to help the Buddha, because they see that the Buddha works very hard. This planet earth has so much suffering, and the Buddha has to take care of all the living beings on this planet earth. Although he has disciples who help him to take care of the people who need help, it does not seem that he has enough assistance to take care of the people. That is why countless bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos volunteered to stay to help the Buddha. The Buddha smiled and said, "Thank you. We have enough people here to do the work." So he pointed to the ground, and suddenly from the earth sprung up countless bodhisattvas. Everyone was beautiful, everyone was a dharma teacher, dharma teachers of every kind: young, less young, male, female, all of them are wonderful teachers, all of them are beautiful, and all of them bow to the Buddha. They all have been trained by the Buddha to be workers on this planet earth.

Shariputra asked the Buddha, "Dear teacher, you were born just forty or fifty years ago in Kapilavastu. How could you have had time to train so many dharma teachers, so many bodhisattvas to assist you?" The Buddha smiled and said, "Shariputra, you have seen me only in this life span. I am not limited in time. You have not seen me in my totality. You have only seen me as a manifested body. You have to touch the Buddha deeper to see that the longevity of the Buddha is infinite, and the presence of the Buddha is unlimited, and that is why I have been able to train countless bodhisattvas as dharma teachers. That is why I have thanked bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos, because here they have enough people to order to take care of the planet earth.

Every word, every sentence of the sutras reveal the same kind of truth, interbeing, the here and the now, the nature of connectedness of everything, everything is inside of everything else, the one contains the all, the all contains the one. If you are able to observe, to look deeply, and touch that kind of nature, you will become birthless and deathless, and you will be able to touch the Buddha at any time you want. Dear friends, we are going to practice walking meditation together this morning. Let's try to step into the dharmadhatu and become birthless and deathless. This is possible. Among us there are those who can stay longer in the dharmadhatu, and every time they hear the sound of the bell, they go back to the dharmadhatu. Those of us who have not been trained, we continue to stay and suffer in the lokadhatu, suffer because our view of separateness, or our lack of insight of interbeing. That is why the training is for us to break through, to know how to look at things in their interbeing nature, to touch the nature of no birth and no death. Happiness is available if you know how to step into the dharmadhatu, the Avatamsaka realm. In the Avatamsaka realm, there is a lot of light. Everyone is emitting light. There is a lot of space. You don't complain there is no space inside and outside. There is unlimited time. You don't complain that time is running out. There are a lot of flowers. Everything you look at can be transformed into a flower that contains all other kinds of flowers. There are a lot of comfortable lion seats. Wherever you sit may become a lion seat. A lion seat is a place where you can find stability, freedom, you don't want to run anymore, and the Avatamsaka realm is available here and now if you know how to step into it.

After the walking meditation, all of us are invited to join in the formal meal. In a three-month retreat, monks and nun used to have a formal meal every day. So we want to show you how we eat a formal meal in mindfulness. There is a little bit of chanting, an offering of the food to all Buddhas in the cosmos, there will be a sharing of the food for other living beings, and we eat in mindfulness so that peace and joy and brotherhood can be there. We inherit, we profit from the mindfulness coming from everyone in the assembly. Everyone is eating in such a way that the Avatamsaka realm is possible in the here and the now, and that is why when we put ourselves in that situation, it may be penetrated by a lot of light and happiness. We have reduced the ritual to the minimum so it will be pleasant for all of us.

Let us practice walking in such a way that with every step we can touch the Avatamsaka realm. I remember six years ago we had a June retreat for 21 days, and after the talk on the Avatamsaka, there was a very beautiful walk. There was some sunshine, the vegetation was beautiful and everyone felt very clearly that they were in it. Everyone was happy, everyone saw everything in a very different way, and I hope this will be possible today with the collective mindfulness and concentration of the sangha.

Going to the Shore of Non-suffering.

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 13, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends. Today is the thirteenth of August, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We still have one *paramita* to learn.

Paramita means perfection, the perfection of the crossing over to the other shore. We have seen that a paramita is not so difficult to practice; even children can do it. Paramita means from this shore of suffering we cross over to the other shore, the shore of well-being. From the shore of anger, we cross to the shore of non-anger. From the shore of jealousy, we cross over to the shore of non-jealousy. If you know how to do it, you can cross over to the other shore very quickly. It is a matter of training, it is a matter of practice, and you can do that with the help of another person or many other persons. It's nice to cross the stream of suffering together, hand in hand. So every time you want to cross, if you feel that alone it would be a little bit too difficult, you ask someone to hold your hand and you cross together the stream of suffering with him or with her.

If you feel you are caught in anger and that anger is a kind of fire burning you, you don't want that; you don't want to stay on this shore suffering from anger—you want to get relief, you want to cross to the other shore. You have to do something. Row your boat to go to the other side. Whether that is walking meditation, mindful breathing, or anything that you have learned here from Plum Village, it can be a boat helping you to cross over to the other shore. Next time when you feel that you don't like it on this shore, you have to make a determination to cross to the other shore. You may like to say to a person that you love that you don't want to stay here on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, and you may like to ask the other person to help you to cross. There are many things we can do together. Sitting and listening to the bell—we can do together, as two brothers, two sisters, as mother and child, or father and child. We can sit down and practice together.

I know a young mother who has a little boy of four years old, and every time the boy is agitated, not calm, not happy, she will take his hand and ask him to sit down and practice breathing in and out with her. She told her child to think of the abdomen, the belly, and breathing in seeing the belly expanding, rising, and breathing out seeing the belly falling. They practice breathing together like that three or four or five times, and they always feel better. If the mother left her baby alone to breathe, it would be a little bit difficult for him because he is so young, he cannot do it alone. That is why the mother sits next to him, and holds his hand, and promises to practice breathing in and out together. I have seen that, I have seen the mother and the child practicing in front of me. Because one day I had tea with them—the little boy wanted to have tea with me—so I offered him some tea, and we had a nice time together. Suddenly there was something, he became unhappy and agitated, so his mother asked him to practice that in front of me, and both did very well. So mother has to learn to practice with her child. Father also has to learn to practice with his child. This is a very good habit, a very good tradition, a husband has to learn to do it his wife, a partner has to learn to do it with her partner.

Every time there is one of us who is not happy, we have to help him, to help her, to go to the other shore. We have to support him, support her. We shall not say, “That is your problem,” no. There is no such thing as your problem; it is a problem for everyone. If one person suffers, then everyone around has to suffer too. If a father tells his son or his daughter, “That is your

problem,” that means the father has not got the insight. There is no such thing as your problem, because you are my son, you are my daughter, and if you have a problem, that is our problem, not yours only. Because if happiness is not an individual matter, suffering also is not an individual matter. You have to help and support each other to cross the river of suffering. So next time when you feel unhappy, you cry, you don't want to be unhappy, then you may like to ask your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters to help. “Please help. I don't want to stay on this shore. I want to cross over.” Then they come and they will help you. He, she will help you.

You should know the practice. We should know how to practice walking meditation, to practice sitting and breathing in and out with our attention focused on our belly. We can invite the bell, to listen together. Every time you feel unhappy or angry, always you can practice listening to the bell. I guarantee that after having practiced three sounds of the bell, you will feel much better.

That is why it would be very helpful for each family to have a bell, a small bell, at least. I don't know whether they have small bells available in the shops, but I think that a bell is very useful. That is why children who come to Plum Village, they are always taught how to invite a bell. If we use a bell, then the whole family has to practice together. It's not possible that one person practices the bell and all the others talk and don't practice. We have to make an agreement within the family that every time there is a sound of the bell, everyone will have to stop—not only stop talking but stop thinking—and begin to breathe in and breathe out mindfully. Your breathing will become deeper, slower, and more harmonious after several seconds. You know you are crossing while you breathe in and out mindfully and listen to the bell. You are actually crossing the stream of suffering. Maybe in Chinatown you can find a bell somewhere, and I think that Plum Village has to arrange so that there are bells in the shop, so that everyone in the family can get one.

I propose that in each home, each family, there be a bell, and I propose that we arrange so that in each house there is one place to practice listening to the bell and breathing in and breathing out. In our house, there are rooms for everything. There is a room for guests, there is a room for playing, there is a room for eating, there is a room for sitting, for everything. Now, as a civilized family, we have to invent another room. I call it the breathing room. Or you might like to call it the practice room, or meditation room—a room that is for the restoration of peace, of joy, of stability. It is very important. You have a very beautiful room for television, and you don't have a room for your own peace, your own joy, your own stability. That's a pity. No matter how poor we are, we have to arrange so that we have a small place, a room in our family, to take refuge in every time we suffer. That room represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. When you step into that room, you are protected by mindfulness, by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Children have to take care of that room. Because according to the practice, once they get into that room, no one can shout at them any more, including parents, because that is the territory of peace. You can take refuge in that, and no one can shout at you and chase after you any more. It is like the compound of an embassy. The compound of an embassy belongs to the territory of that country, and no one can invade that.

That is why in each home we should have such a room, very sacred. You should not use that room for other purposes. You should not go into that room to play chess, to play the radio, to do other things. That room is just for the practice of breathing, of listening to the bell, of sitting meditation, of listening to the dharma talks, dharma discussions. That room should be only for peace, for the restoration of peace and joy. When you know that there is someone in

the room practicing, you should respect that, and not make a lot of noise. You know when you drive through a zone where there is a hospital, you know that many sick people are in the hospital and they need quiet—that is why you don't blow the horn, you don't make a lot of noise. The same thing is true when you know that there is someone in a meditation hall, in the breathing room; you should try not to make noise in the house. If mother is in the meditation room, then you should turn off your phonograph or your television. This is a very good practice.

Every time you get angry, you get upset, you suffer, you know that you need the breathing room. So you think of the breathing room, and as soon as you begin to think of the breathing room, you feel already a little bit better; you know what to do. You don't accept to stay there without doing anything, just to be a victim of your anger, of your suffering. That is why you slowly stand up, you breathe in, breathe out mindfully, and you begin to walk in the direction of the breathing room. “Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step.” When people see you doing like that, they will have a lot of respect: “This person, although she is very young, she knows how to take care of her anger and her suffering.” Everyone will be looking at you with respect, and they will stop laughing and talking loudly; they might follow their breathing to support you. That is the practice. Mother and father—who have received the teaching, who know what it is like to be in anger, who know how to practice when they get angry—mother and father will stop talking and breathe in and breathe out and follow you with their eyes, until you open the door and enter inside. Holding the knob of the door, you breathe in; pulling the door, you breathe out; and you go into it and you close the door behind you peacefully. You bow to the flower in the room—because it would be wonderful to keep one flower alive in that meditation hall, any kind of flower. That flower represents something fresh, beautiful, the Buddha inside of us.

You don't need a lot of things in that breathing room. You need only a pot of flowers—if you have a nice drawing of the Buddha, you can put that—otherwise, one pot of flowers, that will be enough. And one bell, one small bell. I trust that when you go home you will try your best to set up that important room within your home. And you bow to the flower, you just sit down. Maybe you have a cushion—a child should have his or her own cushion—and you need a cushion that fits you, where you can sit beautifully and with stability for five or ten minutes. Then you practice holding the bell in the palm of your hand, you practice breathing in, breathing out, as you have been instructed, and then you invite the bell, and you practice breathing in and breathing out. You practice listening to the bell and breathing in and out several times until your anger and your suffering are calmed down. If you enjoy it, you may like to stay there longer.

You are doing something very important—you are making the living Dharma present in your home. Because the living Dharma is not a Dharma talk. A Dharma talk may not be a living Dharma, but what you are doing—walking peacefully, breathing mindfully, crossing the river of anger—that is a real Dharma and you, it is you who are practicing, who are crossing, so you inspire a lot of respect. Even your parents have to respect you because you embody the Dharma, the living Dharma. And I will be very proud of you. If I see you, I will know that you are doing so.

I know of a family in Switzerland, a family of seven or eight brothers and sisters, a very big family, and they spent time in Plum Village, they learned about these things, and one day while they were home they got into a kind of dispute. Usually one month or two after coming back from Plum Village, you can still keep the atmosphere of peace alive. But beyond three months, you begin to lose your practice. You become less and less mindful, and you begin to

quarrel with each other. So that day, everyone in the family was talking at the same time—all the brothers and sisters except one, the youngest. She suffered, she didn't know why all the brothers and sisters quarreled and suffered at the same time, so it was she who remembered that the bell is needed. So she stood up and reached for the bell, she breathed in and breathed out, and she invited the bell, and suddenly mindfulness came back. Everyone stopped shouting at once, everyone was breathing in and out, and after that everyone burst out laughing, and laughing, and laughing, and made peace with each other. That was thanks to the youngest member of the family. I think she was five at that time. Now she is fourteen, and she is here now today.

[Bell]

If you are an adult, you can practice like that, like your child. Every time you get angry at your husband, at your wife, at your brother, or at your child, you can do like that. Instead of arguing and shouting, you stand up, you breathe in and out, and you practice walking meditation to your breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you are able to handle your anger, to take care of yourself, to love yourself. They will stop what they have been doing, and they may begin to practice.

When you are in the breathing room, inviting the bell, listening to the bell deeply, and practicing breathing, one of your children may like to join you. So while breathing, you may hear the sound of the door opening smoothly. You know that someone in the family is joining you; that may be your child, that may be your husband or your wife. You feel much better that you are not practicing as an individual any longer, but you are practicing as a sangha. That will warm up your heart, as you feel that someone is sitting close to you and beginning to breathe in and breathe out—this is wonderful. Maybe the person—the person who made you angry—after a few moments, feels that he will have to join you in practice. Then you hear the door opening again, and there, he's coming and sitting close to you, and you are flanked by the two people you love the most in the world, practicing breathing in and out. There is no one to take a picture of all of you, but that is the most beautiful picture that could be taken of the family. Maybe you do not have any lipstick or powder on your face, you do not wear the best dress, but there you are in the most beautiful state of being, because all of you know how to practice. All of you embody the living Dharma at this moment. This is something we have to learn—this is a good habit, it's a good tradition, and you are truly the sons and the daughters of the Buddha.

I would like to transmit to the young people today something that they may use in the future. That is a cake. But this cake is not visible now. If it happens that your mother and your father get into a dispute—that happens from time to time—and you don't like these moments, the tension in the family, the disagreements between your father and your mother. The tension is coming up, one of them said something not very nice to the other, and you suffer. It is like the sky just before a storm. It is a heavy, oppressive atmosphere and a child always suffers in such a condition. I have been a child, and I did suffer when the atmosphere in the family was heavy and oppressive like that. But you know that you should not continue to be a victim because it's not healthy to stay long in such an atmosphere. You should do something. There are children who try to run away, but their apartment is too small and they are on the fifth floor. There is no garden around. So they could not get away.

Many children choose to go into the bathroom and lock the door to avoid the tension and heavy atmosphere in the family. Unfortunately, even in the bathroom the atmosphere was still

felt. It's not healthy to be in such an atmosphere. Father and mother do not want to make their child suffer, but they cannot help it—they get into a tension, a conflict. In that moment, I would suggest that you do this: you pull the dress of your mother and you say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just do that; this is another mantra that I am transmitting to you. Whether there is a cake or there is no cake in the refrigerator, you just open your mouth, after having breathed in and out three times, and you say, “Mommy, there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just say that.

It may happen that there is a cake. Your mother will say, “That's true. Why don't you bring some chairs to the backyard? I will make some coffee and bring the cake down for you and for your daddy.” She will say that, and she will take the excuse to withdraw to the kitchen. Because she also wants to cross to the other shore; she doesn't want to stay there forever and get destroyed. But if there is no pretext, it would be impolite, provocative, to just leave like that. So you help her. You say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator,” and she will know, she is intelligent, she knows what you mean. You mean that you don't want this to continue. Then when you hear your mother say this, you say “Yes!” and you run, you run away. You run to the backyard, you arrange some chairs and you clean the table back there. Your Mommy will go into the kitchen, she will boil some water for tea, she will ask you to come and help bring the cake to the backyard and so on. Both of you are doing these things and practicing mindful breathing together. It is very nice, and I will be very proud of you both. You know that you can do it. Please.

Then your father, left alone in the living room, he has seen that, and he has been in Plum Village, so he knows that his wife and his child are practicing. He feels ashamed if he doesn't practice. So he stays there and practices breathing in and out also. He may join you in the backyard with the cake, and the three of you will be over to the other shore in just ten minutes. Don't worry if there is no cake in the refrigerator because your mommy is very talented. She can always fix something.

So this is a cake that I want to transmit to you today, a cake that never disappears. This kind of cake is forever. This is one way of practicing paramita—crossing over. There are many Dharma doors. Dharma doors mean methods of practice. The breathing room is one Dharma door, a wonderful Dharma door. In the next century that's coming in two years, I want to see in every home a breathing room, a sign of civilization. If you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a reporter, if you are a novelist, if you are a film maker, please help. If you are an educator, a Dharma teacher, please help. In every home, there will be a breathing room for us to take care of our nerves, of our peace, of our joy. We cannot be without a breathing room. So the breathing room is one Dharma door that we have to open to the new century, and the cake is also a Dharma door.

When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

The last pebble, we call it *virya* paramita: the continued growth, the continued transformation. We know that when we cook potatoes, we have to keep the pot covered and should not take the lid off because the heat might get out. Also, we have to keep the fire on underneath. If we turn the fire off, then the potatoes could not cook. After five minutes, if we turn the fire out, then we cannot expect the potatoes to cook, even if we turn on the fire for another five minutes, and we turn it off. That is why there should be continued progress, continued practice, the continuation, the steady practice—that is called *virya*.

In terms of consciousness, we know that there are seeds to be watered and there are seeds to be transformed, and if we can continue to water the positive seeds and to refrain from watering the negative seeds, instead we know how to transform them—that is the process of continued transformation. Let us visualize our consciousness. This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called “store consciousness” (*alayavijñāna*) and the upper part is called “mind consciousness” (*manovijñāna*). [Thay draws a diagram.] We know that in our store consciousness there are all kinds of seeds, positive and negative, buried here, and there are something like 51 categories of seeds. If it is a negative seed, the practice consists in preventing it from manifesting itself in the upper part of consciousness. You recognize that there is a negative seed in you and you would not like it to be watered, because if it is watered then it will have a chance to manifest itself in the upper level of your consciousness and it will become a mental formation.

Suppose this is a seed of anger. As far as it accepts to stay still in the store consciousness, you can survive, you are fine, you can smile, you can be joyful, you can even be happy with the seed of anger in you, with the condition that it accepts to stay still. But if someone comes and waters it, touches it, or you yourself water it, then it will manifest itself on the level of mind consciousness. And there is a zone of energy called anger, and it makes the whole scenery unpleasant. It may stay here for some time, maybe for a few minutes, sometimes a half hour, sometimes the whole day, and the more it stays, the more you suffer. And the more it is here, manifested, the stronger it becomes at the base. So if you allow it to manifest, you get two disadvantages. The first is that you suffer up here, and the second is that it grows bigger here. That is why the practice of virya consists in not giving it a chance to manifest.

So if you love yourself, if you care for yourself, you have to arrange so that you will be protected, you will not touch it and water it, and you ask your friends not to water it. “My dear, if you really love me, don't water that negative seed in me. You know I have that weakness, I have that seed in me. If you water that seed in me, I will suffer and you will suffer too.” So if we love each other, we should know each other, we should know the negative seeds in each other, and we should practice so that we do not water them every day. This is the practice of virya. We should plead with the people around us. “Dear people, you know me, you know my weakness, you know these seeds in me. So, please, if you love me, if you do care for me, please refrain, please do your best to protect me and not to touch, to water these seeds in me.” We have to sign a peace treaty. We don't practice alone, we practice with a sangha, with the people we love, also.

If it has already manifested, then we should know the ways to embrace it and to help it go back as soon as possible to the store consciousness. Because the sooner it goes back, the better you can feel; because here you don't have to suffer long, and down here it doesn't have a chance to grow too big. That is the first meaning of virya. The negative should not be encouraged to manifest. And if it has manifested, do whatever you can to take care of it and to have it go back down here as soon as possible.

Third, the good seeds. Please do whatever you can in order for them to manifest as wholesome mental formations. If you know how to love yourself, to take care of yourself, then please look and realize that you have good seeds in you, seeds that have been transmitted by your ancestors, your teachers, your friends. You do whatever you can to allow them a chance to manifest. Because mind consciousness is like a living room, and you would like to invite into your living room only the pleasant people. With a beautiful pleasant person in your living room, you know it is very pleasant, you enjoy it. So don't allow your living room to be

visited by unpleasant people. Invite only beautiful people, pleasant people to be there. That is the third practice of virya. You do that by yourself. You have all the seeds of happiness in here. You have a poem, you have a song, you have a thought, you have a practice, and every time you touch that, you invite it to the upper level of your consciousness and then you feel wonderful, and you keep it in your mind consciousness as long as possible.

Your mind is like a television set, or rather, it is like a computer with many hard disks down here. This is the screen of your computer, you can invite whatever you have down here up there. Selective invitation, that is your practice. You invite only the things that are pleasant. Sometimes the pleasant things are buried down here under many layers of unpleasant things, so you need to help, so that you can take these jewels up to the screen. Leave them up as long as you can, keep them as long as you can, in the upper level of your consciousness. A piece of music, a poem, a happy souvenir, the seed of love, the seed of compassion, the seed of joy—all these positive seeds in you should be recognized and should be touched, should be invited. You ask the people around you, the ones who share your life, “Please my darling, please my friends, if you really love me, really want to help me, please recognize the positive seeds in me and please help these seeds to be touched, to be watered every day.” That is the practice of love. To love means to practice selective watering of the seeds within the other person and within yourself.

Whatever good, pleasant seed is manifested here, we try our best to keep it as long as we can. Why? Because if it stays long in here, at the base it will grow. This is the teaching in the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist psychology. Buddhist psychology speaks of consciousness in terms of seeds. *Bija* is a seed and we have all kinds of seeds within our store consciousness. Store consciousness is sometimes called the totality of the seeds (*savabijaka*). Seeds transform into mental formations. Unwholesome seeds are born here in the mind consciousness as unwholesome mental formations. Wholesome seeds are manifested as wholesome mental formations.

So take care of your living room. Take good care of the screen of your computer and do not allow the negative things to come up. And allow, invite, the positive things to come up and keep them as long as you can. There will be a transformation at the base if you know how to do it. This is the virya paramita: continued practice, continued growth, continued transformation—it should be the same.

[Bell]

Now we should go back to other paramitas. [Thay writes on board.] First is *dana* (giving). Second is *prajña* (insight). This is *shila* (precepts or mindfulness training). This is *dhyana* (meditation), consisting of stopping and looking deeply. And this is *ksanti*, translated in Plum Village as inclusiveness. If you only participated in one of the four weeks in Plum Village, you may like to listen to other dharma talks in order to understand, to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the other five paramitas. We have been showing the nature of interbeing between the six paramitas. If you practice one of the paramitas deeply, you practice all six. You cannot understand one paramita unless you understand all the other five.

So continued practice here means that you continue to practice giving; you continue to practice the mindfulness trainings, you continue to practice inclusiveness (embracing whatever there is), continue to practice stopping, calming, and looking deeply. And you continue to practice understanding. All five are the contents of the sixth. And this is true of all of the paramitas. We have used *dana* paramita as an example, because understanding is a gift,

a great gift. To be able to stop, to calm, and to look deeply is a great gift. To continue your practice is a great gift. To practice embracing everything, including what you may think to be unpleasant in the beginning, that is also a gift. Living according to the five mindfulness trainings is also a great gift. So you cannot practice giving unless you practice the five other paramitas. And this can be applied with all the paramitas, the interbeing of the six paramitas.

In the beginning, I told the children that you don't need money at all to practice dana. You offer your freshness, you offer your presence, you offer your stability, your solidity, your freedom. That's a lot already. And these things can be cultivated by the practice of the other paramitas.

All the six paramitas have the power to carry us over to the other shore so that we will not suffer anymore. After some time, training yourself, you'll arrive at the state of being when you can cross the stream of suffering very easily and very quickly. You have to master the practice, and you are no longer afraid. It is like knowing how to make tofu. If you know that there is no longer any tofu in the house, you are not afraid. A few hours and then you have tofu again. You know how to garden, to practice organic gardening. You know that there are heaps of garbage in your garden. You are not afraid because you know how to transform the garbage back into compost, and you are not afraid at all. While transforming the garbage into the compost, you can be very joyful. Therefore, we are no longer afraid of the garbage in us, the afflictions, the suffering in us. We know how to handle them, how to transform them; therefore, crossing to the other shore is a joy. You don't have to suffer even while crossing. You don't think that only when you arrive at the other shore you stop suffering, no. Crossing is already a pleasure.

It's like a child, when she knows that there is a breathing room, she stands up, and she practices walking meditation to the breathing room, and she already feels better because she knows the way, she knows what to do. So if you train yourself in the six paramitas, they will become a habit, a tradition, a routine; and every time you want to cross, you just cross, and not making a lot of effort, you just cross. It's like how you walk, you practice walking meditation. And you will not suffer any setbacks. You train yourself until you arrive at the state of being called the state of no setbacks, always progressing, not backsliding. That is the meaning of virya. You have mastered the techniques, the ways. That is why you never go back to the state of utmost suffering in which you were caught before.

Life is a continuation of transformation; it's just like gardening. You cannot expect that your garden will only produce flowers—your garden does produce garbage. That is the meaning of life. Those who suffer don't know the art of transformation—that is why they suffer, because of the garbage in them—they don't know how to transform. But you, you know the art of transformation; that is why you can embrace even your suffering, and you are able to transform. You never get back to the state of being overwhelmed, not knowing what to do with your suffering. If you train yourself in the six paramitas, one day you will feel that you are no longer afraid of any suffering. It's like doing the dishes. Of course, every day you have to use dishes, you have to eat, and therefore you produce dirty dishes. But for us, making dishes clean is very easy. We have detergent, we have water, we have soap, we have the time, we know how to breathe in, breathe out, how to sing while doing the dishes. So doing the dishes is no longer a problem. It can be very joyful. So you don't suffer a setback any more, just because you know the way, you know the paramitas, you have the boats to cross over to the shore.

In the bell there are a few questions that I have not answered. The newest questions that I have are these two. “Thay, why don’t I feel that I love myself? I am unable to love myself.” That is one question. And the other question is: “Without anger, without hate, how could I have the energy to work for social justice? How could you really love your enemy? If you love your enemy, what kind of energy is left for you to step up your struggle. If you accept your enemies as they are and then you do nothing?” So these two questions, I think they are linked to each other. And I think that the elements of the answers to these questions have already been offered in the Dharma talks. But we need to work with ourselves, we have to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, looking deeply, and recognize all the seeds in order to see the true nature of interbeing, then we could understand the real answers to these questions—not only as theory, but also as practice.

“Why don’t I love myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love myself?” The question can be answered by yourself, if you look into what you call “love,” what you call “self.” You have an idea of love, an idea of self, that is very vague. If you look deeply into what you call love, if you look deeply into what you call self, then you will not feel that way anymore. Self is made of what? Of non-self elements. Looking into yourself deeply, you can see all the non-self elements within you.

When I look into my store consciousness, I see the seed of hate, the seed of fear, the seed of jealousy, but I also can see the seed of generosity, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding. So these seeds must be opposing each other, fighting each other within me, like good and evil fighting, the angel and the beast. They are always fighting within me. How could I have peace at all? It seems that you have something in you that you are not ready to accept. There is a judge in you, that is a seed, and there is a criminal that is being judged in you, and both are not working together in you. So there is a deep division in you, a deep sense of duality within yourself, and that is why you feel that you are alienated from yourself. You cannot love yourself, you cannot accept yourself. But if you know how to look at things in the light of interbeing, you know that everything is linked to everything else and the garbage can always serve as the food for the growth of the flower.

The other day I said that while walking in the Upper Hamlet, enjoying so much the flowers, the vegetation, the beauty, I came to a place where I saw there was some excrement left by a dog or something like that. I told the children I did not mind because I have a great trust in the earth. Earth is great, earth has a big power of transformation, and I know that earth will be able to transform the dirty things into nutritive elements soon for the vegetation. So I still continued to smile, and I didn’t mind at all. I saw the interbeing nature of the two things, the flower and the excrement. Looking in one, I saw the other.

The same thing is true with garbage and flower, afflictions and compassion and happiness. All mental formations in us are of an organic nature. If we know how to take care, to embrace, we will be able to transform and we will make the afflictions into the kind of nutriment that will grow, that will help my wisdom, my understanding, my love, my compassion, to grow. If you have that kind of insight into yourself, that both garbage and flowers inter-are, you would be able to accept the negative things in you in the way an organic gardener would be able to accept the garbage in her garden, because she knows that she needs the garbage in order to nourish her flowers. You are no longer caught in the dualistic view, you suffer much less.

Then when you look back, look deeply into your so-called self, you see that your self is made of non-self elements. What you don’t like in you, you are not responsible for alone. Your society, your parents, your ancestors are equally responsible. They have transmitted those

seeds to you because they have not had a chance to recognize them. They did not have a chance to learn how to transform them, that is why they have transmitted them to you. Now you have an opportunity to recognize them, to learn ways to transform them, and you take the vow to transform them for your sake and for the sake of your ancestors, your parents, your society. That is the vow of a great being, of a bodhisattva.

So if you understand things like that, you will not say, “Why don't I love myself?” It is possible to love yourself. The way offered in Plum Village is very concrete, how to love yourself. Your self, first of all, is made of your body. You love yourself by the way you eat, you drink, you rest, you relax. You don't love yourself because you don't practice these things, you don't allow your body to rest. You force your body to consume the things that destroy it. So how to love your body, it is written down very clearly in the teaching of Plum Village: mindfully eating, mindfully consuming, mindfully allowing your body to rest and to restore itself. When we come to Plum Village, we have to learn these things. Sometimes you don't love yourself, you destroy yourself, and yet you don't know. The Buddha said that there are people who think that they are the lovers of themselves, but in fact they are enemies of themselves. They are doing harmful things to themselves, they are destroying themselves, and yet they think that they are loving themselves. They destroy themselves with their lack of mindfulness in eating, in drinking, in dealing with their body, with their feelings, with their consciousness.

When you have a feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—do you know how to recognize it? Do you know how to embrace it? To calm it? That is the process of loving. When you come to Plum Village, you have to learn these methods of recognizing, accepting, calming, and transforming. To love means to practice—to practice looking, seeing, understanding, and transforming. When you love yourself like that, you love other people also. You love your ancestors, you love your parents, you love your children and their children, and you love us all by taking good care of yourself and loving yourself. Because you are made of us. Your self is made of non-self elements, including ancestors, clouds, sky, river, forest, and us.

You may say, “I want to love myself, but I don't feel that I can love myself.” If you understand the teaching, if you can look into yourself and the nature of love, you see that love is a process of practice. Unless you practice, according to the teaching, you are not loving yourself at all, and not loving yourself, you cannot love anyone. Because self-love is at the same time the love for others. The moment when you know how to breathe in mindfully and smile, you make yourself feel better and you make the person in front of you, behind you, feel better also.

As far as hate is concerned, it is the same. You say that there is a lot of social injustice and other people are doing evil things to destroy themselves, to destroy you, to destroy the world, and it feels good to be angry at them. But who are they, who are you? You feel that you have to do something to help the world, to help society, but who is the world, who is the society?

When you see delinquent children, caught in drugs, in violence, and locked up in prisons, do you think that you should hate them or you should love them? You should take care of them. Why do they behave like that? Why do they look for drugs? Why do they have recourse to violence? Why do they oppose their parents, their society? There must be reasons why they do so. One day they may kill you, they may use a gun and shoot you down, they may burn your car. Of course, you can get angry at them, you can fight them, and if you have a gun you might like to shoot them down before they shoot you. But that doesn't prevent them from being the victims of society, of their education, of their ancestors, because they have not been

well taken care of. Punishing them would not help them; there must be another way to help them. Killing them would not help them.

There was a sea pirate who raped a small girl of twelve years old on a refugee boat. Her father tried to intervene, and they threw her father into the ocean and he drowned. After the girl was raped, she was so ashamed, she suffered so much—also because of the death of her father—she jumped into the ocean and drowned.

That kind of tragedy took place almost every day when there were boat people. There was not a day when we did not receive news like that in the office of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris during the war. I remember the morning when I read the report about that girl, I did not eat my breakfast, I went into the woods. I practiced walking meditation, embracing the trees, and so on. Because I felt I was being raped and I was one with that child. I was angry at first. But I knew that I had to take good care of myself, because if I let the anger overwhelm me, make me paralyzed, then I could not go on with the work I should do, the work of peace and taking care of the victims of the war. Because at that time, at the office of the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris, we took care of providing the delegations in the peace talks with real information, trying to stop the war, and trying to relieve the suffering of war victims, including orphans and so on. At that time we were able to get support for more than 8,000 war orphans to continue to live and to go to school. So we could not afford to be paralyzed by such news that came every day into the office, so we had to practice together. Without mindful breathing, mindful walking, and renewing ourselves, how could we go on with our work when we were flooded with information like that about the war?

That night in sitting meditation, I saw myself born in a fishing village along the coast of Thailand, because I was meditating on the sea pirate. I saw myself as born in the family of a poor fisherman, and my father was very poor. My mother also was very poor. Poverty had been there for many generations. My father got drunk every night because the work was so hard and he earned so little, and he beat me every time he got drunk. My mother did not know to read and to write, did not know how to raise a child, and I became a delinquent child, playing with other delinquent children in the village along the coast of Thailand. At the age of 12, I already followed my father to the sea to help him with the fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful dress, who went to school in their beautiful automobiles, and I felt that I would never enjoy that kind of life at all.

Now I am a fisherman on my own. I have my fishing boat, and yesterday someone told me that the refugees very often bring with them some gold, and if I just go and take that gold just one time, I will be able to get out of this kind of chronic poverty and that will give me a chance to live like other people. So without understanding, without compassion, just with that kind of aspiration, I agreed to go with him as a sea pirate. When out in the sea I saw the other pirates robbing and raping the girl, I felt these negative seeds in me also come up very strong—there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do everything you like here, nobody sees you—so I became a sea pirate, and I raped the twelve-year-old girl, and she jumped into the river. Nobody knows. I have some gold now.

If you are there on the boat and if you have a gun, you can shoot me, I will die. Yes, I will die and that is the end of my life. You shoot me, yes; you can prevent me from raping the girl, yes; but you cannot help me. No one has helped me since the time I was born until I became a 18-year-old fisherman. No one has tried to help me—no educator, no politician, no one has done anything to help me. My family has been locked in the situation of chronic poverty for many hundreds of years. I died, but you did not help me.

In my meditation, I saw the sea pirate. And I saw also that that night along the coast of Thailand, 200-300 babies were born to poor fishermen. I saw very clearly that if no one tried to help them, then in 18 years many of them would become sea pirates. If you were born into the situation of that sea pirate, if I were born into the situation of that pirate, then you and I could become sea pirates in 18 years. So when I was able to see that, compassion began to spring up in my heart, and suddenly I accepted the sea pirate.

You have to do something to help them, otherwise they will become sea pirates. Shooting them is okay, but it does not solve the problem. Locking up the people who use drugs and who do violence is okay, but that is not the best thing to do. There are better things to do. There are things you can do to prevent them from being what they are now, and that is the work of love. In the enemy, you can see the beloved one. That does not mean that I would allow them to continue the crime, the violence, to destroy. I would do whatever I could to prevent them from causing harm, but that does not prevent me from loving them. Compassion is another kind of energy.

You say that anger is a formidable source of energy that pushes you to act. But anger prevents you from being clear in mind, from being clear sighted. Anger cannot give you lucidity, and in anger you can do many wrong things. As parents, we should not teach our children when we are angry. Teaching our children when we are angry is not the best time. It does not mean that we should not teach them, but we teach them only when we are no longer angry. We don't teach with the energy of anger, we teach only with the energy of love, of compassion. That is true with the sea pirates, with the people who are destroying life. We have to act, but we should not use the energy of anger as fuel. We have to use the energy of sacrifice, the energy of compassion.

Great beings like the Buddha or Jesus Christ, they know the power of compassion, of love. And there are people among us who are ready to suffer, to die, for love. Please don't underestimate the power of compassion, of love. With the energy of compassion in you, you continue to remain lucid and understanding is there. When understanding is there, you will not make a mistake. You are motivated by love, but love is born from understanding.

[Bell]

Many of us are motivated by the desire to do something for social change, for restoring social justice. But many of us get frustrated after a period of time because we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We think that the evil is only in the other side, but we know that the evil is within us. Craving, anger, delusion, jealousy—they are in us. If we don't know how to take care of them, to reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are strongly motivated by the desire for social action, but because they don't know how to take good care of themselves, they don't know how to live and work with harmony among themselves, they give up the struggle after some time.

That is why it is very important that we take good care of ourselves, and then learn to look at the other people not only as criminals but also as victims. Of course, we should do everything we can to stop them in the course of their destruction. But we should also see that they are to be helped at the same time. We should be able to make it very clear to them that, "If you do this, we will try to stop you by whatever means we feel that we need, but we will do it with

love and compassion. We will try to stop you, to prevent you from doing whatever you try to do to us and to your victims, but that does not mean that we are acting with hatred or anger. No, we do that with love. If you know how to go in that direction, we will support you wholeheartedly because it is our desire, our hope, that you move in the direction of harmony, of nondiscrimination, of social equality.”

We have to make it very clear, because in that person there is a friend, and there is an enemy in him or in her at the same time. The enemy is the negative seeds, and the friend is the positive seeds. We should not kill the friend in him, we should only kill the enemy in him; and to kill the enemy in him is to recognize the negative seed in him and try to transform it, to not allow the situation to be favorable for the continuation of crime and destruction.

So that is a strategy, because to practice you need a strategy. You need a lot of intelligence, of deep looking, and you also need a lot of compassion and love. In the context of social change, we have to practice together. We have to unite our insights. We have to bring our compassion and insight together in order to succeed. We know that only love, only compassion and understanding, can really bring a change, because hatred cannot be removed by hatred. This is something said by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, hatred can never be removed by hatred.

[Bell]

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energies

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Dear friends,

Welcome to the Summer Opening in Plum Village. Who is three years old? Who is less than three years old? I would like to introduce to you Bao-tich who is four years old. He just celebrated his birthday two days ago. Here is Bao-tich. This is his second year in Plum Village to practice. Can you turn around? He came last year and he practiced very well. He was so happy, so this year he came again. Bao-tich is his name. It means the store of jewels. I am very happy that he is here. He has a great time being in Plum Village. He came about ten days ago and I had the opportunity to drink tea with him and to play with him. I am very happy when I am surrounded by young people. They look like flowers to me, very fresh, very innocent, and I wish that the young people will stay with us for the whole retreat, thirty days.

This year we will also practice pebble meditation, but instead of having five pebbles we have six. Each person may like to make a small bag like this. You are free to choose the color you like. I also have a bag of this color and inside I keep six pebbles. They are all here, six pebbles, one, two, three, four, five, six. In the other bag I have also six. They are bigger, like this. After having picked them up outside, I used soap to wash them carefully, and I dry them. Then I put them into a bag like this. I think today you may like to make your own pebble bag. You go and pick up six beautiful pebbles, you wash them, you dry them, and you put them in your small bag, to practice pebble meditation. I think the grown-up people, if they want, they are welcome to do the same, pebble meditation. We will give a name to each pebble, a specific name to the pebble, and you may like to inscribe the name on each pebble also. Because this summer we are going to learn about the practice of the six *paramitas*, the six

ways of crossing over to the other shore. There is this shore of the river and there is the other shore of the river. When you are unhappy, you are on this shore, and you don't want to stay on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of happiness. When you are not peaceful, you are agitated; you are on this shore. You don't want to stay on this shore; it's not very pleasant to be agitated, so you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of peace.

Suppose you are overwhelmed with anger and hatred. You don't like it because anger and hatred make you suffer. You don't want to stay there on the shore of anger and hatred, the shore of suffering, so you would like to cross over to the other shore, the shore of nonhatred, of compassion, of love. We are going to learn together how to practice this kind of crossing. Don't believe that we need many years or months to cross to the other shore. Sometimes we need only a few minutes, or even a few seconds, to cross from one shore to the other shore. The six paramitas will be represented by the six pebbles. Each pebble will bear the name of one paramita. Paramita means crossing over to the other shore.

I'd like to teach you how to practice with the bell, because it is very important to practice with the bell, very pleasant also. There are all sorts of bells, and this is about the smallest kind of bell. This bell also has a cushion to sit on. This is a mini-bell. If you look at the bell, you see that it has also a cushion under it. So a practitioner may like to learn how to invite the bell to sound, because when we hear the sound of the bell we can also cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are sad, when you are agitated you are on this shore, but if you hear the sound of the bell, and if you know how to practice listening to the bell, then very quickly you can overcome your anger, your agitation. You cross over to the other shore, and suddenly you feel peaceful and happy. You need only to listen to the bell and breathe in and out a few times to find yourself on the other shore, the shore of peace, which is more pleasant. Every one of us can learn, it is very easy.

You may like to keep the bell on its cushion like this in order to invite the bell to sound. We don't say hitting the bell, because that word is not nice, or striking the bell. But we say invite the bell to sound. "Bell, my dear bell, may I invite you to sound." That's very nice. The bell becomes a kind of friend. So with you left hand you hold the bell like this and with you right hand you hold the bell inviter. You may call it a stick, but here we call it the bell inviter. And we say "the bell is invited" or "you invite the bell."

There are many of us who don't need the cushion. We put the bell directly on the palm of our hand, and by doing so we notice the sound will be more beautiful. You ask why? Because when we put the bell on the cushion, quite a large surface of the bell is touched by the cushion. The sound is all right, but if you put it without the cushion, the sound will be better. Suppose I hold the bell like this. The bell is not very free, that is why the sound of the bell isn't beautiful. See:

[Bell]

When the bell is free, the sound of the bell will be more beautiful. That is why in Plum Village, we like to put the bell like this on our hand in order for the bell to be as free as possible. When we invite the bell the sound will be beautiful. Before you invite the bell to sound, you have to bow to the bell first. Why do we have to bow to the bell? Maybe people will say that it's strange, why is this person bowing to a bell? It's queer. You may just look at the bell and say "Hello bell," that's all right too. Bowing to the bell is a way of greeting a bell. You can greet the bell with a smile. You can greet the bell with a few words: "Hello there, my

little bell, my darling little bell.” You can greet the bell in several ways. There are people who would like to greet the bell by bowing like this, so it’s up to you to choose. So when you hold the stick, the bell inviter, you have to practice breathing in and breathing out three times, so that you become a real bell master. A real bell master is someone who is concentrated. The body and the mind together, and that is our practice. So even before we invite the bell to sound, we become already calmer and happier. You may like to breathe in and pay attention to your in-breath and breathe out and pay attention to your out-breath. You breath in and breathe out like that three times. Now you have become concentrated, you have become a bell master. When you know that you are a bell master, you can begin to invite the bell.

I think today everyone has to practice, no matter how young you are. We should learn how to invite the bell. This is very important. To invite the bell you have to wake the bell up, like this. [Muffled bell] This is the waking up sound. Why do we have to wake the sound of the bell up first? Because we don’t want the bell to be caught by surprise. We don’t want the people around us to be caught by surprise. We want to warn people that a big sound of the bell will be heard. That is why we begin by waking up the bell like this. [Muffled bell] Everyone knows that they will hear a real sound of the bell in just a few seconds. So you prepare people. You give people the opportunity to stop thinking, to stop talking, to prepare themselves for receiving the sound of the bell. So you allow them about five or six seconds, or even more like this. [Muffled a bell] Then you invite the bell.

[Bell]

So we distinguish between the two sounds, the first is the waking up sound, and the second is the full sound, remember? To produce the waking up sound you have to keep the inviter like this. [Muffled bell] You don’t take it off, like this. [Bell] You breath in. Everyone knows that a full sound is going to be heard, so everyone stops thinking and begins to smile to receive the sound of the bell. When the full sound is heard, you practice breathing in and you recite a short poem.

“I listen, I listen,” that’s when you breathe in. And when you breathe out, “This wonder sound brings me back to my true home.” My true home is in here, where I can find peace and stability and joy. So we have to learn by heart this short poem:

Listen, listen,
This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home

“Listen, listen,” that is for your in-breath. “This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home,” that is for your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out three times like that before you invite the second sound. Everyone in the hall will be practicing with you, and enjoying breathing in, breathing out and listening to the bell. After having practice three sounds like that, you become much better, you are calmer, you are more stable, you are more joyful. That is the practice of calming.

I think I am going to lend you this bell, the young people, and you have time to practice this morning and this afternoon, also. I have a few. I would recommend that before you practice inviting the bell, you look at the bell, you bow to the bell, and you say “Hello bell.” You pick it up and you put in on your left hand like this. You raise your hand to the level of your eyes. This is a very beautiful movement. You look at the bell like that. You breathe in, breathe out, and you smile three times. You know in Plum Village we have a beautiful poem to recite silently when we look at the bell and breathe in and breathe out. This poem is like this:

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

All of us know it by heart. The poem is available in Vietnamese, in French, in English, in German, and so on. You can learn it. Every time I breathe I read silently one line and when I breathe out I read the second line and so on. I repeat:

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

After you have breathed in and out like that you become calm, you become a bell master. You can begin to invite the bell. Shall we try to practice together? You will breathe and I will read the *gatha*, the poem for you.

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

Now I am waking up the bell. [Muffled bell]. Now I am inviting the bell.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the second sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the third sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

I have completed three sounds and I have breathed in and breathed out nine times. I slowly lower the bell and I put it on the cushion. I bow to it again. I have accomplished the task of being your bell master. This is for the small bell, for the big bell it is a little bit different, but we will learn later.

What is the purpose of practicing the bell? Practicing the bell is one of the ways to help us cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are unhappy, when you are agitated, you don't like to be on the shore of anger, agitation and unhappiness. So you invite the bell to bring your body and your mind together, to get still, to get calm, to get peaceful. And while you practice breathing in and out and listening to the bell, you are crossing the river of suffering. You go to the other shore, the shore of peace and of happiness.

It is my hope that in every home we have a bell, so that you can practice crossing to the other shore together as a family. In Plum Village we practice also when we hear the telephone ringing. If you observe, you see that every time the telephone rings, the brothers and sisters in Plum Village practice breathing in and out, calming and smiling exactly like when they hear the bell. So the telephone sound becomes a kind of bell for us. We also practice with other sounds as well. When the clock, every hour or every quarter of the hour, plays the music, the monks, the nuns, and other people in Plum Village, they stop talking, they stop thinking and they go back to their breathing. They practice mindful breathing, and they feel calm, they feel happy. They are close to the shore of happiness and peace. I think there will be brothers and sisters that will help you to learn how to practice the bell today. I hope that after tomorrow you will be able to do it. This is the end of the dharma talk for young people. When you hear the bell please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and learn more about the practice.

[Bell]

My dear friends, we have several kinds of energies within ourselves. There are positive energies that we should cultivate, and there are negative energies that we should be able to transform. We have habits. We have good habits and we have bad habits, and the practice of Buddhist meditation is to recognize our habits, in the form of energies, and to transform them or nourish them. When you hear the telephone ring, or when you hear the sound of the bell, if you have the habit of the practice, you need no one to remind you. You just stop you thinking and enjoy breathing in and out. This is a good habit. In Plum Village all of us have that good habit. Every time we hear the bell. Every time we hear the clock playing the music, or the telephone ringing, we always naturally go back to our breathing, and we enjoy our in-breath and out-breath and smile. We don't make any effort because it has become a habit, a good habit. We learn to do it in a way that makes the moment pleasant.

There is no point of practicing if it is not pleasant. The practice should be pleasant. This is very important. When you practice listening to the bell, the practice should be pleasant and nourishing. Otherwise, why should we practice? The same is true with the practice of sitting, walking, eating in silence, and so on. There are many people who practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, sharing a silent meal, but not everyone enjoys the practice.

If you don't enjoy your practice, it means you are not doing it the way you should do it. The question is not to practice or not to practice. The question is to practice in such a way that you get the healing, the transformation, and the joy of the practice. In our tradition the practice of meditation is seen as a source of nourishment. So it is very important that we make the practice pleasant, joyful and nourishing. If while sitting you suffer, then you should know that your way of sitting is not correct. If you are sharing a silent meal and you don't feel happy, it means that your way of eating is not correct. Something has to be corrected in your way of practicing, your way of looking at the practice, your way of conducting the practice. We have brothers and sisters around, we can always consult them and ask them for their experiences.

They will show you. Many of us have been in the practice for a long time and we can help you to practice with more joy. We have to practice with intelligence.

[Bell]

Suppose we have the habit of walking very quickly, very fast. Suddenly, when we arrive at Plum Village, we are requested to slow down. We feel it is not pleasant. Since everyone is walking slowly, you have to slow down and you don't feel happy. So your practice is a cause for your suffering. Walk slowly, yes, but walk in such a way that it makes you happy, relaxed and calm, that is the point. We have to ask how to walk slowly and yet not to suffer and to enjoy the walking. So it requires some understanding, some insight, some practice, to enjoy walking meditation.

You are facing a kind of habit, the habit of walking very quickly, running. That habit is rooted very deeply in our daily life. Maybe our ancestors used to walk very quickly and they have transmitted to us that way of walking. Perhaps many generations of people have believed that happiness is somewhere there in the future. We have to go there in order to be happy. Happiness is not possible right now, right here. That kind of belief, conscious or unconscious, has become very strong in us. We believe happiness is impossible here and now. That is why there is a kind of energy pushing us to run, to run all our life, searching for a time, a place, when happiness is possible.

So we understand why we get caught in that kind of habit, always running. We are determined to stop, to transform that habit, and we learn how to make steps that can allow us to touch life deeply in each moment. With that kind of learning and practice we will be able to walk more slowly and we will begin to enjoy touching the earth with our feet, combining our steps with our in-breath and out-breath. We just feel wonderful to walk like that, walking without any intention of arriving. That is new for us. We have to learn to develop the new habit. And as we get the energy of the new habit, we will enjoy walking.

So the practice is to recognize the old habit, the negative habit, the bad habit, to recognize the energy of our habits and smile to them. And also to cultivate the new habit, the good habit, until the new habit begins to produce energy. When we have the new kind of energy, we don't have to make any effort, we just enjoy listening to the bell, we just enjoy walking slowly, we just enjoy eating in silence, because we like it. We get the nourishment, the joy, of doing so. Suddenly, the practice becomes pleasant, joyful, nourishing.

It would be absurd if we followed a practice that makes us suffer. The Buddha always reminds us his Dharma, his practice, is pleasant in the beginning, in the middle, at the end. So the practice should be lovely, should be pleasant, should be joyful, whether you are sitting or walking or eating or drinking. Whether you are cooking or cleaning. Cooking and cleaning should be done in such a way that it can provide you with peace and joy and nourishment.

We know how strong, how powerful is the habit energy. We notice that there are times when we are not ourselves. We cannot be ourselves. We are carried away by our habit energy. We did not want to say that, we knew that saying that would create damage in our relationship with the other person. But finally, we said it. We knew that we should not do it. We knew that if we went ahead and did it we would create damage in our relationship. But finally, we did it. We said it was stronger than us. What is stronger? The habit energy. So we felt helpless, powerless. We felt very weak that we cannot cope with it. It is so strong, our habit energy. And after having said it, after having done it, we regret it. We feel sorry. We condemn

ourselves. Sometimes we make a strong vow that next time we will not do it again. We will not say it again. But next time, we do it again, we say it again. The habit energy is very strong. That is why we have to be able to practice, to learn ways of handling that habit energy in order to transform it.

The Buddha did not recommend fighting against your habit energy. He recommended the practice of recognizing these habits. The practice of recognizing, if we take it up in our daily practice, will become another kind of habit, a good habit. You are able to recognize everything that is happening within yourself, including the habit energy that you consider to be stronger than you. Recognizing like that does not mean that you have to suffer because you have that habit, because that habit may not have been learned during your lifetime. It may be a kind of habit energy transmitted by several generations of your ancestors and you just received it. You have to recognize that it is there and try to transform it for yourself, for your parents, and for your ancestors.

About ten years ago I toured in several states of India to offer retreats and Dharma talks to the communities of the Ambedkar society consisting of the former untouchables. A friend there helped arrange my tour. One day I was sitting with him in a bus. I was enjoying very much the landscape outside. I was very happy to be in India, to offer retreats and Dharma talks and to enjoy the people and landscape there. When I looked over at him, he was sitting on my right, he was not relaxed. He was very tight. He had the habit energy to worry too much. I knew that he was trying his best to make my trip pleasant, so I told him, "My dear friend, I know you are trying very hard to make my visit pleasant, but I would like to tell you that I am very happy right now, it is very pleasant to sit here, I enjoy it very much, why don't you sit back and enjoy yourself, also. There is nothing to worry about now." He said, "OK" and he sat back. I continued to enjoy the palm trees and other things outside and just a few minutes later I turned around and looked and he was just like before, very tight, very rigid.

I know it is not easy. When you belong to a caste discriminated against for four thousand, five thousand years, you have to struggle day and night. The habit to struggle day and night was there deep in him. It had been transmitted by several generations of ancestors. There he is with his strong habit energy, struggling day and night, not being able to relax for a second, for a minute. Of course we can help him to relax, to understand that there is nothing to worry about, that it is possible for us to enjoy life in the present moment. He is perfectly capable of understanding this and practicing this, but it does not last. Just for a few seconds and he allows himself to be caught again by that very strong habit energy. So there is no point of blaming yourself because you have that habit energy. You know that that habit energy is not something you created for yourself, it has been transmitted. You recognize your ancestors who have suffered. You know that now you have an opportunity to transform that energy for yourself, for your ancestors, and for your children and their children.

Also about ten years ago there was a young gentleman who came from North America to the Upper Hamlet for the practice and he stayed two, three weeks in the Upper Hamlet, very happy. He was surrounded by brothers and sisters who always practiced walking meditation, sitting meditation, working in the kitchen with mindfulness, and so on. One day he was asked by friends to go to the market in St. Foy La Grande to do some shopping, because it was Thanksgiving Day and everyone was asked to make a dish, to cook something special of their country, to offer to our ancestors. The Chinese would cook a Chinese dish, the Dutch would offer a Dutch plate, and so on. He was making something with the other Americans so he went to St. Foy La Grande and shopped.

While shopping he noticed that he became agitated, that he was getting in a hurried mood. He was surprised, because during his three-week stay in Plum Village he never behaved like that. He was surrounded by the sangha, he was always mindful and peaceful. The energy of the sangha helped him stay mindful and peaceful, but here he was alone. Suddenly without the sangha around that old habit energy emerged. Because he had practiced for three weeks already, he also had another kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness. He was able to recognize the coming up of the old habit. He also saw that he inherited that habit from his mother, because his mother was always like that, always in a hurry. So he breathed in and he said, "Hello Mommy." Suddenly the habit energy was no longer there. When you recognize it, that energy will lose its power over you. It will go back into the depth of your consciousness, into your body, waiting for appropriate circumstances to manifest again. He just breathed in and said, "Hello Mommy" recognizing the habit as it was. "My mother is always like that." So he was free from the habit during the practice of breathing in and breathing out. He knew that without the sangha around he was still weak and he tried to follow his breathing mindfully. He finished his shopping and came back and told us the story.

You can recognize the habit energy because you have the energy of mindfulness, a kind of energy within you that does the work of recognition. Mindfulness is the energy that can recognize what is there in the present moment. When you drink, you know that you are drinking. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, the energy of mindfulness is there. We call it mindfulness of breathing -- Anapanasati. When you walk, and you know that you are walking, mindfulness is there. It is called mindfulness of walking. When you eat and you know that you are eating, that you are chewing, then mindfulness is there, we call it mindfulness of eating.

We try to be mindful in every act we do, in every moment of our daily life, and that is the best way to cultivate the second kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness.

If you practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, sitting mindfully, doing things mindfully, you cultivate the kind of energy called mindfulness. Only with that energy can you recognize the old habits and prevent them from pushing you to do things that you don't want to do. To say things that you don't want to say. So cultivating the energy of mindfulness is the heart of our practice. That is why our friends are requested to practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, and eating mindfully. From your tent to the meditation hall, you are requested to walk mindfully. Every step must be mindful. You may like to coordinate your steps with your in-breath. When you breathe in, you know you are breathing in, mindfulness of breathing. When you make a step, you know that you are making a step, mindfulness of walking. You can combine the two. Breathing in you make two steps or three steps, breathing out you make two steps or three steps. You don't need to arrive in the meditation hall to practice meditation. You begin already from your tent. And you may begin even before that. When you hear the bell announcing sitting meditation, the sound brings you back to you true home, already. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. There you are in your tent, but you are already in the meditation hall. Every one of us in our tent, in our room, we are listening to the bell. We are practicing breathing in calmly, breathing out smiling. We are practicing together as a sangha. After having practiced with the bell, we begin to walk in the direction of the meditation hall. Everyone is doing it at the same time, so the meditation hall is everywhere, should be everywhere, even in private, in the shower room.

If you practice like that one week, two weeks, three weeks, you'll be like our friend going to the market of St. Foy La Grande, shopping and having the capacity to recognize the habit energy when it emerges. Recognize it as it is, smile to it, and do not fight it, you don't need to fight it. You don't need to feel ashamed of it. It's like when you do the work of gardening.

There are fresh vegetables, there are flowers, but there is also garbage. We know that vegetables or garbage, they are all organic. Flowers sometime have to turn themselves into garbage. And garbage, if you know how to take care of it, will be transformed into flowers again. Both flowers and garbage are organic matter. We don't discriminate against the garbage, because we know that with the garbage we can make flowers again. So the bad habits, the negative energies in us, you don't have to throw them away. You may like to make use of them to feed your good habits.

So the practice of meditation does not mean that you draw a line of discrimination between the positive energy, what you call goodness, and the negative energy, what you call evil. That is not the way. That is discrimination. That is not the insight that you should use. The insight is interbeing. You look at both as organic. This is because that is. That is because this is. So with the garbage you can make the flowers and the flowers are to become garbage later on. The process of gardening is the process of continued transformation. We recognize the flowers in us; we recognize also the garbage in us. We do not have to discriminate. If it is a flower, we recognize it as a flower. "Hello, flower." If it is a piece of garbage, we say "Hello garbage." No discrimination. No fear. The only thing is to learn how to practice gardening. You are an organic gardener. You know how to take care of your bad habit energies, to transform them into the good ones. We don't imagine that after having eliminated all the negative things we only have the positive things, because the positives feed on the negative and vice versa. So that is the insight of nonduality. It is so important in the teaching of Buddhist meditation. The insight of interbeing: garbage and flowers inter-are.

So when you have learned how to accept the negative things in you, you already have peace. I don't mind that there are negative things in me. I accept them. I have learned a way to take care of my negative things. I also have learned a way to take care of my positive things, to keep them alive longer. I have learned how to transform the negative things, in order to nourish the positive things. All of that can be done only if you have the energy of mindfulness. That is why our practice here is to learn how to eat mindfully and joyfully, how to walk mindfully and joyfully, how to breathe mindfully and joyfully. The "mindfully" should go together with the "joyfully." While sitting together and eating in silence there are a number of people who are very happy, just to sit there and share a meal with the sangha. It can make many people very happy. Because eating is a very deep practice, it's like when you practice sitting, or walking, or washing your clothes. Your practice may be very deep if the energy of mindfulness is strong during the practice.

[Bell]

We know what the negative habit energies have done to us and our beloved ones. We know that we have to take good care of our habit energies and to transform them. That is why we are determined to cultivate the energy of mindfulness in order to recognize that habit energy every time it tries to come up. This is very important. Therefore, during the time together here we do everything with the purpose of cultivating that energy. That is why we don't spend our time talking a lot, or thinking a lot, or reading a lot, or studying a lot. We use our time here in order to just practice mindfulness. Mindfulness everywhere, mindfulness every time. Walking, we only walk mindfully. Eating, we only eat mindfully. We try to do everything mindfully, because we want to have enough of that energy to be able to recognize our habit energy. Because we know that once we are able to recognize the habit energy, the habit energy will not overwhelm us again. Every time the habit energy is recognized it will lose some of its strength. And the next time when it comes up again we do the recognition again.

That is the only way to diminish its power. By doing so we use that energy to feed the new habit energy, the positive habit energy.

We should be able to recognize that around us there are refreshing, beautiful, and healing things, and inside us there are refreshing, healing and wonderful things. The wonders of life are everywhere, within us and around us. Cultivating the habit of recognizing them, touching them is very important. The sky may be very blue, very clear, and very beautiful, but if you are caught in your sorrow, caught in your anger, you cannot touch the blue sky. The children are fresh, lovely, but you have no capacity of being with them, of recognizing them as the miracles around us. We imprison ourselves in our sorrows, our worries, our fears. We are not capable of touching the beauties, the wonders of life around us, and even inside of us. So we have to practice to learn the new habit of touching these wonders of life.

To be alive, to be still alive, is a miracle. To be able to walk with other people on this beautiful planet, it's a wonderful thing. Remember when you were very sick, unable to breathe, you could not enjoy your breathing. You had a fever, and you had no strength to go out of your room. Your strength had left you. Your desire was to be able to get up and to go into the garden and just walk in the garden, but you could not do it. So having strong feet, being able to walk, having eyes still in good condition that allow us to contemplate the sky, the clouds, the luxurious vegetation, to look at the people, the children -- it's a wonderful thing. But we had that bad energy, that negative energy, of neglecting these kinds of things; we only tried to focus on our suffering, our problems. So we had to learn to cultivate that new energy, to recognize and to touch the positive things. Because we need the nourishment, the healing. If we cannot touch the healing and refreshing elements around us and in us, we cannot get the healing and nourishment. Therefore cultivating the energy of mindfulness to recognize what is there, wonderful, refreshing, healing, is very important.

A pebble, a cloud, a flower, all are wonderful, all are mysteries. It would be a pity if we cannot be with a leaf, with a flower, with a cloud, with a stream of water, only imprison ourselves in our sorrow and fear. So recognizing the habit energy, recognizing our fear, our sorrow. Yes, that is our practice. But to recognize the sky as it is, to recognize the fact that you are alive, that you are walking, that there are living beings around you, that you have eyes that can look at things, you have fingers that can touch things, is equally important. The practice is simple and you have the sangha around you. Everyone is trying to do the same, living each moment of our daily life deeply, trying to dwell in, to establish ourselves in the present moment. Not to run, because running is a strong habit energy, running to the future, or running to the past. That is why the Buddha made it clear that the past is already gone and the future is not yet there. There is only one moment when life is available; that is the present moment. Your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you are not able to touch the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. All these things are very simple, and not difficult to understand at all. Therefore, all our energies and time should be used to put it into practice. Let us together practice mindfulness in our daily life. Let us learn how to go back to the present moment, to live deeply every moment of our daily life. Because in that present moment you will find the most beautiful things, what we are looking for: peace, joy, stability, love, the kingdom of God, the pure land. All these things can be touched and found only in the present moment.

So learning how to go back to the present moment and to live deeply in that moment is the kind of new habit energy that you have to cultivate, and as a sangha we do it together. You are requested to practice listening to the bell, but when there is no bell you may like to practice listening to the birds, mindfully. Because every sound can help you go back to the

present moment and to practice. Every sight, also, can serve as a mindfulness bell. When you see a brother, a sister walking mindfully, a monk or a nun walking mindfully, that is another mindfulness bell, you go back to yourself, you enjoy breathing in breathing out, you touch yourself, you touch life, you touch the world deeply in that moment. To meditate means to be alive, to live deeply that moment. That is why we practice Noble Silence. When we wake we begin to walk, begin to arrange things in mindfulness, we follow our breathing, we listen to the bell mindfully, we go to the meditation hall mindfully, we enjoy the minutes of sitting, of walking, of chanting mindfully, we enjoy our breakfast mindfully. Everything is for practice. Eating your breakfast is the practice.

Allow yourself to be penetrated by the collective energy of the sangha. Offer your energy of mindfulness to the sangha. When you practice mindful breathing and walking you emit the energy of mindfulness from you. And everyone is practicing and emitting the energy of mindfulness. That is why being in sangha we can allow ourselves to be penetrated by that kind of energy of mindfulness. It will be transforming and healing to us. So we receive the energy of the sangha and we participate and contribute to that collective energy. That is why practicing in a sangha is much more pleasant and easier than when you practice alone. Practicing together, walking, breathing, sitting, doing things, we offer each other the energy of mindfulness.

After the retreat we can continue to cultivate that energy at home. We may like to set up a sangha in your area to continue your practice. Because according to this practice the energy of mindfulness is the only kind of energy that can help change our life. Bring back the joy of life, bring back love, understanding, and transform the old habit energies that have been causing us and the people we love a lot of suffering. In dharma discussions let us not be theoretical, let us be very practical, let us exchange the experiences of our practice: how to dwell firmly in the present moment and how to live deeply each moment of our life. How to encounter life deeply in order for us to look deeply and get the kind of insights that will be able to liberate us from our anger, our fear and our suffering.

After this dharma talk we shall gather outside for a short walking meditation and we will gather around the big bell tower for some chanting.

[Bell]

We are the Continuation of our Ancestors

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 21, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July 1997. We are in the Upper Hamlet. I have a picture of me as a baby monk I want to share, to show you, especially the young people. I was seventeen. And then I have a picture of mine when I was sixteen. You see the difference after one year of practice. I have to tell you that I was a novice practicing with other novices and I had a great time. I was a very happy novice. I think it is very important to be happy when you are a novice because if you are happy as a novice, you will be happy as a monk. So you might like to pass it around and look closely at the baby monk. Maybe we'll have to print several copies for the children.

A few years ago there was a reporter. He is of American origin, but he lives in Denmark. He is a film maker, also. He came to my hut and interviewed me with his big, huge camera. One of the questions he asked is this, "Thay, if today the Buddha and Jesus met on the street, what do you think they would tell each other?" And this is my answer. "There is no if, because they are meeting each other every day. They are telling each other many things. Because you don't look deeply, you don't listen deeply, that is why you have not seen them meeting every day and exchanging every day." I said that because in my mind it is clear that the Buddha is here and Jesus is also here.

We are the continuation of the Buddha and of Jesus. The son is always the continuation of the father. Everyone has to agree upon this fact. Scientist or nonscientist, theologian or nontheologian, they have to accept the fact that the son, the daughter, is the continuation of the father. and also the mother. In fact, they are the father and the mother. So it is absurd to say, "I don't want to have anything to do with my father."

There are people who get angry with their father and make the declaration, "I don't want to have anything to do with him." That would be impossible, because he, whether he wants or not, he is the continuation of his father. He is his father. That is why the only thing for him to do is to practice reconciliation within. Because his father is within him, there is no way of getting rid of his father. There are people who are angry with their mother, and they feel the same. They want to forget her. They don't want to have anything to do with her. Is that possible? No. They are the continuation of their mothers. They are their mothers. They cannot escape. That is why the practice is to go back and to reconcile with the mother within and with the father within.

We have blood parents, we have blood ancestors; but we have also our spiritual parents, our spiritual ancestors. The Buddha is my spiritual ancestor. I was born from him. I am his continuation. I am him. Later on in life I have adopted Jesus as another spiritual ancestor. In me they are alive. I do not have any conflict with them as I do not have any conflict with my blood parents and ancestors. This is a very important practice.

I am the Buddha and you are the Christ, because I am the continuation of the Buddha and you are the continuation of Jesus Christ. And we are seeing each other every day and we are talking with each other every day. And, it's silly to say, "If today the Buddha and the Christ

met each other, what would they say to each other?" They have to meet each other. They have to say things to each other every day, because that is also for the sake of peace. If people of different religious affiliations do not see each other, do not meet each other, do not talk to each other, then peace will not be possible. So, I told the reporter that they are meeting every day and I wish them success.

Now, children, let's listen to this. You might wonder whether the Buddha is a person or where he is, because in the drawings you make and give to me you like to draw the Buddha. Where is the Buddha now? How can we touch him, see him and talk to him? Is he a he or maybe a she? Is there one Buddha only, or are there many Buddhas? These are very interesting questions and you have to ask yourself and to ask your friends.

There is a Buddha whose name is Shakyamuni, and I have adopted him as a teacher, but I know that besides him there are many other Buddhas. And there are part time Buddhas, there are full time Buddhas. We have to get rid of the idea that the Buddha is a god. No, the Buddha is not a god. The Buddha may be a human being like you and I. But the Buddha may be a deer or a squirrel. Because anyone, anything that is animated by Buddha nature can be described as Buddha. Buddha nature, what is it? Buddha nature in Sanskrit is *Buddhata*. Buddha nature is inherent in every one of us, not only humans, but nonhumans as well.

I'd like to tell you about the Buddha nature that is in us. It is like electricity. I believe that electricity is. There is such a thing as electricity because I have seen electricity manifested in many forms. In the dark, you turn on the light and you have light. That is a manifestation of electricity, right? It is very hot, and you turn on the fan, and you have the wind. Well, that wind is made by electricity, so electricity is seen in the form of the wind. And when you open your refrigerator to take some ice cream, you see that the cold in there, the capacity to retain the cold, to keep your ice cream not melting, that is also electricity. When you drive your car, if the car can run like that it means electricity is there. There is something that can help generate electricity and that electricity can propel your car or your airplane.

I know that electricity exists because I have seen light, I have seen the wind, I have seen the cold, I have seen the force driving the car. You cannot say that electricity is just the light, or electricity is just the wind. No. So, Buddhahood, Buddha nature, can be seen in a person like Shakyamuni but Buddha nature can be seen in other forms. You yourself, you have the Buddha nature in you. If you know how to touch it, if you know how to nurture it, then the Buddha nature will manifest in you and you have more peace, more joy, more stability, more freshness. That is why to practice meditation is to touch the Buddha nature in you and to help it manifest so that you feel much better. That is why I have offered you the practice of pebble meditation.

Yesterday I talked about what you can give. First of all, I said the most precious thing you can give to the people you love is your true presence. In order to be truly present, you have only to breathe in and breathe out and become fresh like a flower. And you go to her, go to him, the person you love, and say, "Darling, I'm really here for you." This is a gift. I also said that you have to offer your freshness. In order to be fresh, you know what to do. Relax, breathe in, breathe out, smile. Put down your worry, your anger, and you become fresh. That is something you can offer to people you love.

There is a young practitioner among us and his name is Bao-tich and he is four years old, or four years young. He just celebrated his fourth birthday a few days ago and he has a very nice practice. Every time he gets agitated, his mother invites him to sit like a Buddha. My dear

little boy, it does not seem that the Buddha nature in you is so evident. So, would you like to sit down in the lotus position and practice breathing and smiling so that the Buddha will come back into your heart? And Bao-tich always listens to his mother, and practices sitting down. He sits very beautifully and after a few minutes, he says, “Mommy, touch me to see whether the Buddha is already clear.” And his mother will touch him and say, “It begins to be clear, so continue sitting for another minute.” So after Bao-tich has become still and serene and peaceful, his mother will touch him again and say, “Now the Buddha in you is very clear, so go and play, my darling.” So Bao-tich is very glad and runs and plays again. He is there. He promised that next year he will speak English.

I would like you to practice the same. You may recuperate the Buddha nature in you very quickly. We have made a song for you to practice. “Flower - Fresh. Mountain - Solid. Water - Reflecting. Space - Free.” You need only to use four of your pebbles—one pebble for Flower; one pebble for Mountain; one pebble for Water; and one pebble for Space. This can be practiced with music.

Suppose this is the pebble for Flower. You put it on the palm of your hand and you practice breathing in, breathing out three times with the flower in mind. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” You do it in such a way that you become a real flower. It is not difficult: if you want to be a flower, you will be a flower. Relax. Smile. Smile with your eyes. Smile with your mouth. Smile with your ears. Smile with your body. You can do it. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” In fact, we are all flowers. Human beings are a kind of flower. If you don’t look exactly like a flower it is because you have not taken good care of yourself, you have cried too much, you have dried yourself up. You have allowed sorrow and worry to enter you and destroy you. So, recuperate. Restore your floweriness. This is one of the ways to do it. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” This is not imagination. You are a flower. You have the right to recuperate your floweriness.

There are many of us when we grow old—sixty, seventy, eighty—we are able to retain our floweriness. Congratulations to you who are able to do so. I have seen people eighty, ninety, still very fresh. We have to admire these people. We have to follow their example. We have to learn from them how to retain our floweriness. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower. Breathing out, I feel fresh. You know, a flower does not seem to do anything, but without flowers, life would seem very sad. So you don’t have to do anything. If you can be a flower, you serve the world. “Breathing out I feel fresh.” You do that three times, you pick up the pebble and you put it on your right.

Now you pick up another pebble. This pebble’s name is Mountain. You know that stability is very important. A stable child, a stable adult, can inspire people and make them happy. Stability is very important. The image of the mountain can help you to practice. “Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.” Nothing can assault me. If you have a stable position for your body, if you know how to sit erect; if you know how to enjoy your in-breath and out-breath, and become the master of yourself, then any provocation, any sorrow, anything you imagine cannot shake you. So you stay solid like a mountain.

“Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” Solid as a mountain, that is our practice. You learn to be solid in your sitting position and then you will learn to be solid in your way of walking. You will be solid in your way of driving. You will be a solid driver. When you cook your dinner, you can practice your solidity, also. Three times. “Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” And you put aside the second pebble.

Now you pick up the third pebble. The name of the third pebble in this practice is Still Water. Not just water, still water. There are times when you look at the water you see it very still. So still you can see the blue sky and the white clouds in it. You can see the trees reflected in it, exactly like up there. If you have a camera, you just aim at the surface of the lake and take the picture. When you develop it people might think that you took it from up there because the image is so faithful. So when your mind is calm, still like that water, you will reflect everything as it is. You don't distort things. You don't have wrong perceptions, because wrong perceptions make you angry, make you suffer.

The Buddha said wrong perceptions are the ground of all our suffering. The other person does not want to destroy us but we still think that she is trying to destroy us. The other person is not trying to make us suffer, but we believe that his intention is to punish us. When we see a piece of rope in the twilight, we might think that it is a snake, but it is not a snake. In the twilight, you are walking and suddenly you see a snake. You scream and you run away. When your friend brings in a torch, you realize that it is not a snake at all. It is only a piece of rope. That is what we call a wrong perception. A wrong perception always makes us suffer and that is why we have to learn to see things as they are and not distort them. It is very important to practice being calm like still water because still water can reflect things as they are. Breathing in, I see myself as still water. Breathing out, I reflect things as they truly are.

Lastly, freedom, space. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free." People who have space within don't suffer. People who have space around them, they don't suffer. It's like the moon. Look at the moon traveling in the empty sky. It has a lot of space around it. The moon is serene, happy. But we, sometimes, we don't have space inside. We are full of worries, of anger, of fear, of projects, of desire. We don't allow ourselves to have space inside, and there is no space outside at all. We don't feel that we have the time. We don't feel that we have space to move around. What kind of life are we having? When we love someone, we love in such a way that we no longer have any time, any space and we deprive the person we love of space and time, and love becomes a prison for us and for the other person. That is not true love. If you love someone and if that someone isn't capable of moving any more, that's not love. So space is a very big gift. You have to offer him space if you want him to be truly happy. Offering him space inside. Offering him space outside around him. This is a very important practice. We will learn how to put more space inside and to arrange so that we have plenty of space around us. That is very crucial for our happiness. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

Many people in their lives buy a lot of ropes and tie themselves up and finally, they cannot move. First they think that these ropes are very much needed for their happiness. I would not be happy if I don't have that rope. The rope of fame. The rope of wealth. There are many kinds of ropes. I would not be happy if I could not buy that rope. So we buy all kinds of ties. Not only one to put around our necks but several kinds of ties to put around our bodies, our feelings, our perceptions and finally we can no longer move. We have no space. Happiness is impossible. That is why we have to practice to free ourselves and to put into ourselves a lot of space and around us also. This is a technique of liberation. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

During the practice we develop our flowerness. We develop our solidity. We develop our calm, stillness and we develop our freedom. These qualities combined together we call Buddha nature. If Bao-tich sits still, that means he wants to recuperate, to restore some of his Buddha nature so that he becomes more calm, more joyful, more loving. All of you can do

like him and also, even better, you can become like a Buddha. So the Buddha is not something outside. The Buddha may be a person like Shakyamuni. But the Buddha nature should be in you and if you practice well you can touch that Buddha nature in you and you will develop your floweriness, your solidity, your freedom and your stillness.

Let us ask someone to sing “Breathing in, Breathing out” for us. Let us sit beautifully and practice. We don’t sing with her. We just practice the song. And, I am doing the movements. If you like you can do the movements, but the movements are not enough. We have to breathe and become a real flower and to become a real mountain. When I breathe in, I see myself as a mountain, I really feel I am a mountain.

Breathing in, breathing out,
Breathing in, breathing out,
I am blooming as a flower,
I am fresh as the dew.

I am solid as a mountain,
I am firm as the earth,
I am free.

Breathing in, breathing out,
Breathing in, breathing out,
I am water, reflecting,
What is real, what is true.

And I feel there is space
Deep inside of me,
I am free, I am free, I am free.

You see, meditation can be fun. There are many ways of practicing meditation, and you can meditate in music as well. Now I would like to offer Bao-tich, the young people, and the less young the practice of visiting the Buddha within. Don’t think that this statue is the Buddha. It’s made of clay only. We want the real Buddha. The real Buddha is made of these four elements: freshness, solidity, stillness and freedom. And you know that these elements are within. I like to touch the real Buddha and not the clay Buddha. A clay Buddha is sometimes helpful because it helps us to go home to touch the real Buddha.

You may sit down beautifully and you breathe in, breathe out a few times and you put your right hand on your heart and you say, “Hello, Little Buddha, are you there?” You ask first the question, “Hello, my little Buddha, are you there?” And you listen. You listen with all your heart. If you are too agitated, too troubled, you might not hear the little Buddha answering you very clearly. So you ask him for the second time, “Hello, little Buddha, are you there?” If you pay attention, you will hear his voice or her voice, “Yes, I am here.” But it may not be very clear. The voice of the Buddha becomes clearer and clearer as you become calmer and more solid. You may ask for the third time, “Hello, little Buddha are you there?” And you listen. This time the Buddha’s voice is very clear, “Yes, surely, I am always there for you.”

Remember the first mantra. The Buddha is practicing the first mantra. “I am always there for you, my darling.” And then when you hear the voice of the Buddha in you, you say, “I am very glad. You are my freshness. You are my floweriness.” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I am your freshness, your floweriness.” Do try to cultivate your floweriness. And then you say, “Dear Buddha, you are also my stability. You are a mountain in me.” And you listen, and the

Buddha says, “Yes, I am your stability. I am your solidity. I am the mountain in you.” You hear it. You hear the Buddha answering you very clearly. Sometime if you speak English, the voice will be in English. If you speak German, the voice will be in German. I am sure, because that is your Buddha.

“Dear Buddha, you are my stillness, my calm, is that right?” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I am your stillness. I am your calm.” You become glad and you say, “Dear Buddha, you are my freedom. You are space within me and around me.” And the Buddha in you will say, “Yes. I am your freedom. I am space in you and surrounding you. And you say, “Dear little Buddha, I am very glad that you are there for me.” And the Buddha says, “Yes. I am always there for you. I am glad that you visit. Come and visit often.” You say, “Dear Buddha, I need you very much. Without you, I would suffer.” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I will try my best to be with you all the time, and I also need you. If you visit me often, I will be clearer. I will be more apparent and I can help you better.”

Visiting the Buddha at least once a day is important. If you get agitated several times a day, it is very important to visit your Buddha several times a day. This is the end of your Dharma talk. When you hear the bell, stand up, bow to the sangha and go out to continue your learning and practice.

[Bell, the children leave]

My dear friends, it is very important to make a connection with our ancestors and the future generations. Alienation is a kind of sickness. There are people who don't feel they are connected with anything at all and they suffer from being cut off, from loneliness. There is no understanding. There is no love that can nourish them. Therefore, to practice restoring the connection is very important.

I always feel that I am the continuation of my ancestors. Every day I practice touching my ancestors. In my country every home has an altar for ancestors, blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. An altar is just a table, but it is very important. You place that table in the central part of your house and you focus your attention on the table as the point of contact between you and your ancestors. Usually every morning we come and offer some incense to our ancestors. Our ancestors do not need to smell incense, but we want to light a stick of incense to our ancestors because the practice of lighting incense focuses our attention on the presence of our ancestors. During the time you strike the match, you light the stick of incense, you offer the incense on the table, you have an opportunity to touch your ancestors within yourself. You realize that your ancestors are always alive in you because you are the continuation of your ancestors.

In your sitting meditation you can practice like this, “Daddy, I am your son. I am your daughter.” That is a fact. You know it so well, but you don't feel it sometimes. You feel that your father is one person and you are another person. But in fact that is not so. You are a very real continuation of your father. It is like the plant of corn is the continuation of the seed of corn. Although the statement is very simple, you have to perceive it, to feel it, to live the reality of it. “Daddy, I am your daughter, I am your son.” No matter how hard it is for you to make the statement, you have to make it because that is the truth. Even if between you and your father there is a lot of difficulty, you still are his continuation. You are still him. All the sufferings that he endured may be still in you, and it is up to you to work for the transformation. If you are able to transform the suffering in you, you have your father in you, you practice for both of you.

Maybe when you were young, you suffered so much already you are determined to be very different from your father. You will never do what he has done to you. You were so determined, and yet because you don't know how to transform the energies that has been transmitted by him to you, when you grow up, you have the tendency to behave exactly like he did. That is called the wheel of *samsara*, the vicious circle. We know we hate that. We don't want to do it, but we still continue to do exactly that. We make our children, our partners, suffer also.

The habit energy is transmitted from generation to generation. The only way is to recognize that you are just the continuation of your father, your mother; you are him, you are her, and you are determined to practice to liberate you, to liberate him at the same time. That is your blood ancestor. Your ancestors have transmitted to you many positive seeds, but also many negative seeds. It is up to you to practice to develop the positive seeds and to diminish and to transform the negative seeds. The essential is to learn how to do it, learning from the Dharma, learning from the Sangha.

We know that the practice here is to cultivate mindfulness to be able to recognize the tendency, the habit energy, every time it begins to show itself. Not fighting, not suppressing, but just recognizing and embracing it with the energy of mindfulness so that it will not continue its course of destruction. If you allow it to go on its way, there will be damage done to you and to the people you love. You did not want to say that, you did not want to do that, but you said that, you did that anyway because you don't know how to take care of that habit energy. That is why there must be continued practice in order to generate the energy of mindfulness for the recognition and transformation of this habit energy.

And then there are your children and your grandchildren, your blood children. You know that they have inherited some of your habit energies. The habit energies you have received from your ancestors and also have transmitted to them. In each cell in your body you can find everything. Each cell of our body contains all the habit energies of all generations of ancestors.

You have heard of the techniques of cloning, and now we are in a position to be able to clone humans. They just take one cell and arrange to have that cell be in a position to reproduce another you. And that once again proves the teaching of the Buddha to be very close to the scientific findings of our times, that one contains the all. That is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka*, that one contains the all. So one cell in our body can contain the whole universe, can contain all our former generations, our ancestors. So you have transmitted all of that to your children and grandchildren. You don't know. It's very quick. But you have transmitted millions and millions of things to them in just one second or less. The positive and the negative at the same time you have transmitted. You are a link between your ancestors and your children. You have received and your have transmitted. You know that your children, if they are lucky, they will meet someone to help them to nourish the positive things and to transform the negative things. Otherwise, they'll carry you very far into the future without any chance of transformation and healing.

If you have the chance to practice, to do the work of transformation and healing, you may be able to help your child, your children, your grandchildren to do so. Because, if you are the continuation of your ancestors, your children are a continuation of you and you help link your children with your ancestors. You help your ancestors to link with your children.

The same thing is true with our spiritual ancestors. When I teach a young monk or a young nun or a young lay person, I always have the image that that young person is going to continue me and to continue my spiritual ancestors. So that the main thing for me to do is to transmit the best things I have received from my spiritual ancestors, only. I survive with my disciples. They will be my continuation. That is why I focus so much attention and energy and time and love toward the teaching, because that is the only way to be kind to my ancestors' transmission, transmitting the best.

There are two ways. My disciples, my students, are my continuation. My student, my disciple needs me to get connected with his or her spiritual ancestors. In me I carry the Buddha, the patriarch, my teachers and it is that sense of the Buddha, the patriarch, the teachers that I transmit to my disciples. So, my disciple needs me to get linked with all the ancestors. I serve as the link. And I need my disciple to get linked with the future generations, because without him, without her, the best things I received from my ancestors will not be transmitted. I rely on my disciples to continue the lineage and to transmit the best things from the lineage of ancestors down to further generations. We need each other. My disciple needs me to get linked with all spiritual ancestors and I need him or her to continue me, and ancestors in the future. We need each other. This should be true with our blood family also.

When you practice meditation, which means to practice looking deeply into yourself, you see that your ancestors are still there in you. They are still there in you, alive, just because you are there. Look at this hand. You will say that this is my hand. Right, but not enough. This is also the hand of my mother. This is also the hand of my father. This is the hand of my ancestor. Remember when you were a small child. You had a fever and your mother came and she put her hand on your forehead, and felt so good. Your mother may have passed away, and you remember that lovely hand, that gentle hand, and you miss it. Still, if you look deeply into your hand, you see this is also your mother's hand. "Breathing in, I know this is also the hand of my mother. Breathing out, the hand of my mother is on my forehead." So, the hand of your mother is still available at any time. The hand of your father, the hand of your ancestors is always available, because your hand is there.

The idea of me and mine may be an obstacle. Yes, there is me, there is mine, but this is also him and his, her and hers. That is the fruit of the practice of looking deeply. This hand is also the hand of the Buddha. These feet are also the feet of the Buddha, because without the Buddha, I would not be able to make peaceful steps on this planet and to get the nourishment I need and all of us need. Without the Buddha, without my teachers, how could I have been able to walk peacefully with stability, with freedom and solidity, and with joy? This foot is my foot. This foot is also my mother's, my father's and of the Buddha's. Where else do I have to go to find my mother, my father and the Buddha? No, I don't have to go anywhere. I just touch myself deeply and I touch them all. They are always alive in me.

If you practice like that, alienation will no longer be a problem. You think you are too alone. Everyone has let you down. No, that is not true. That is an imagination. That is an illusion. The Buddha is always with you and Jesus is always with you. Your ancestors are always with you, your children also. They are always with you. Touch yourself and you can already touch your children. When you contemplate a lemon tree in spring, although you don't see any lemons yet, you may see some lemon blossoms, but you know the lemons are already there. Because the lemon tree is there, the lemon blossom is there, the lemons are there as fruit. So, even if you are a young person, you are not married yet, but if you touch yourself deeply, you can already see your children and grandchildren. A young monk, a young nun, who hasn't become a teacher, if he or she practices well, and she can touch herself and see already the

presence of her disciples and grand disciples and great grand disciples in her. So, touching the present, you touch all the past and you touch all of the future, because the present moment includes all the past and all the future. If you touch one cell of your body, you touch all of your ancestors and you touch all your children and their grandchildren. This is the teaching of Lord Buddha, that one contains the many, touching the one deeply you touch the all. Touching the present moment, you touch infinity.

[Bell]

Whether you have some problems with your parents or not, I would propose that tonight in sitting meditation, you try this. “Breathing in, I know that I am the son of my father, or the daughter of my father.” And we are not contented just with pronouncing the sentence. We have to see it. We have to see us as the true daughters of our fathers. We have to see the relationship, the oneness. You have only the time for an in-breath to visualize that, to touch the fact that you are truly his daughter, her daughter. If you don’t succeed, try again. “Breathing in, I see myself; I know that I am your daughter.” “Breathing out, I smile.” I smile at the fact that I am your daughter, I am your son.” Do it for a few times. Then, “Breathing in, I know I am your continuation. Breathing out, I know I am your continuation.”

You don’t need to imagine anything. You need only to touch reality as it is. Meditating does not mean dreaming, getting away from reality. To meditate means to touch reality as it really is, to touch suchness. And then, “Breathing in, I know I am you, my father. Breathing out I know I am you, my father.” Sometimes it is hard, but you have to succeed. Because that is true, hard fact. No one can demonstrate the opposite. “Breathing in, I know your difficulties, my father.” You have to see his difficulties; you have to really see them. There were things he did not want to say, but he said it. There were things that he did not want to do to you, but he did it. You also have done it to your children, to your beloved ones, so why do you have to condemn, to blame your father? We are weak. We are overwhelmed with our difficulties, our problems; and we do things that we don’t want to do. “Breathing in, I know, father, you have your difficulties,” and try to see these difficulties.

If you begin to see the suffering, the difficulties of your father, or your mother especially, then naturally, compassion will be born in your heart, because you have learned that understanding creates love, compassion. Try to see the difficulties, the suffering that that person has endured in his childhood, in his life, and that is the practice of looking deeply. If needed, you continue to practice for five, ten minutes or even fifteen, you have to succeed, because this is very important work. “Breathing in, I know there are things you wanted to do but you were not able to do.” You had a dream, father, not fulfilled, and you want me to fulfill that dream for you.

A father always has dreams for his son or daughter. He was frustrated; he could not fulfill that dream, that desire. Silently, unconsciously, he wants you to be able to do it. In the beginning, that desire is very strong. Later on, the suffering might coverup the desire, but the desire is still alive. All fathers and mothers have that kind of desire. And you also. So you have to find out that kind of dream and desire, and you say, “Father, I’ll do it for you.” If your father did not have a chance to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, to get the calm and the transformation, you will do it for him. If your mother did not have the chance, you’ll do it for her. You practice for both. You practice for all of them, your ancestors. Cut through the wheel of *samsara*. Do not allow it to make you go around. Don’t allow it to be transmitted to your children, to your disciples, for your children are somehow your disciples.

Have you practiced touching the earth? Touching the earth may look like a ritual, but it is not necessarily a ritual. There are times when you lie down flat on the earth and you surrender everything. The earth is my mother. I surrender myself entirely to her. I have come from the earth and I will go back to the earth. Lie flat on the grass and be one with the earth. That is touching the earth. In Plum Village we practice the three earth touchings. The first one is to connect ourselves with our ancestors and with our children and their children. A vertical line. In the position of earth touching you have to get linked to your ancestors and to your children before you stand up. You might use all kinds of methods, like the one I just proposed to you, “Father, I am your daughter, I am your son. Father, I am your continuation; I am you. Ancestors, I am your continuation. Ancestors, father, I vow, I promise that I will try to do what you have not been able to do, to end all of these afflictions, frustrations and to open up for freedom and transformation.”

When you bow down like that and touch your ancestors, you see that you have lost your identity as a separated existence. Why? Because you realize your position in the river of being. You are only a continuation. You are only a transition. Above you there are ancestors and below you there are children and grandchildren. So you become one with the river, and suddenly you lose your solitude of being a separated existence, because you know that you are your ancestors; you are your children. You become immortal.

First you might think that some of your ancestors are not to your liking. They made mistakes. They did wrong things. Yes, they made mistakes, they did wrong things; but they are your ancestors. Your parents are your youngest ancestors. They may have done wrong to you and to other people, but they are your ancestors, your parents. You, yourself, you are not perfect. You have done good things, yes, but you have done also wrong things: to you, to your ancestors and to your children. Who are you not to accept them as your ancestors, as your parents? The ancestors, I know, some of you are perfect. I can look up to as my example, but some of you were weak and have made mistakes, but I recognize all of you as my ancestors. Because in myself, I realize that I have strength and also weaknesses. I also make mistakes. I also make people suffer; so who am I not to accept you? So you accept your parents, you accept your ancestors. So you feel much better.

If you suffer because of your children: first you think that your children will do exactly what you tell them to do, but finally you find out that they have their own ideas, their own desires and they do things not to your liking at all. You feel a distance, a separation between you and them. Sometimes you say, they are not my children; my children are not like that. I do not recognize them as my children. My children must be like this, like this, like this. Parents have a tendency to think like that. But in fact, if we look into ourselves we say, “Sometimes I did things that did not please my parents. I have shortcomings within myself. I am not perfect. Why do I have to expect my children to be perfect?” So if you realize that you forgive your children, you will love them again, accept them again.

The first earth touching is very healing. After having touched your ancestors and accepting them entirely as your ancestors, you begin to touch your children and your grandchildren and realize that although they make mistakes and sometimes they are not very kind to you, but they are really and truly your children and your grandchildren. You have to allow them a chance—because you yourself, you want to have a chance for healing and transformation—so you get into good terms with your children again. I don’t have blood children, but I have a lot of spiritual children, and I have to practice that way, too. I cannot expect my students to be perfect. Sometimes they make terrible mistakes but I continue to love them, to help them, to give them a chance. That is my practice. Only in that way can you help them. So if you have

problems with your parents, if you have problems with your children, your grandchildren, this is the practice. Learn more. Practice diligently every day and learn more from your own practice. And after one week, two weeks, you'll feel much better. Peace will be in your heart and between you and them.

I can tell you that there are people who attended only one session of earth touching and get that transformation. They cry a lot, a lot, during the practice and after they feel very light and they connect again with their ancestors, their fathers, their mothers and their children. You may practice earth touching in many ways. Use your intelligence and creative ideas to practice. But the principle is to touch and to look deeply to see that you are only a continuation. You serve as a link between your ancestors and your children.

Now I would like to offer you the second earth touching. It is symbolized by a horizontal line. It has to do with living beings that are now around you. When you touch the earth for the second time, you practice to link with everyone who is alive in the present moment. People in your family, people in your society, people who are happy and people who are unhappy. You have to see the interconnection between you and all of them. In the process of the practice, you might suffer a little bit, but that suffering is very helpful.

First of all, you try to touch the great beings that are around you, *mahasattvas*. The great beings are around you, if you know how to look mindfully you will see that you don't need to go back into the past to find them. They are around you. Great beings are *bodhisattvas*: mindful beings who have the capacity of being solid, being joyful, being compassionate. You know that around you there are such people—and you need to recognize them, that is very important.

There are those who are now among the poor and oppressed everywhere in the world who continue to work for the liberation, for the improvement of the life conditions of living beings. They work during the day; they work during the night. They encounter a lot of misery, oppression, pain. And yet, they can still retain their energy and hope. They don't give up because they have a large heart. They can endure, they can embrace, they can include. They are great beings. And don't think that they are in the sky; they are around us. There are those whose names we hear, but there are countless of them that are not known to you, but they are there. Not only Mother Theresa is one. We know a few names, but there are a multitude of them, a little bit everywhere in society. In this assembly there are many of them I know personally, because they are motivated by a great desire, not a desire to consume, to get famous, but a desire to serve, to help, and that energy in them makes them very happy. They are animated by that desire to help, to bring relief, to bring joy to people. They are *mahasattvas*, great beings. They don't give up when they encounter difficulties. They continue. They have solidity in them. They have freshness in them. They have space in them. Even if the people they try to help shout at them, they can still smile. They don't get angry at them.

I know there are many nurses on their graduation holding a candle like this. They feel the vow to help patients as a source of tremendous energy in them, but they have not encountered the fact that the patients, the sick people, are sometimes very difficult to love. They are very demanding, very difficult at times. So these nurses who started with a very refreshing, strong desire to help sometimes have to withdraw. They were not trained in nursing school about *shanti paramita*, how to embrace, how to include, how to forbear. So in medical school, I think we have to learn the six *paramitas*, to learn how to open our heart to make it big in

order for us to be able to embrace and not suffer. So great beings are those who are able to embrace, to include and not to suffer.

And we should be able to connect with them—very important for our support. Every time we think of them we feel the energy coming in again and that is why during the second prostration, the second touching of the earth, you have to be able to touch them. If you get to know some of them, personally, that would be very helpful and in the process of practice, to get to know more of them and you will get the comfort that many of them are out there. You get a strong source of support. So you fill yourself with a lot of energy and you become a great being yourself.

In the later part of the practice, you see you are one with oppressed people, with the people who suffer. You see yourself as a frog singing happily in a clear pond and you see yourself as a grass snake silently advancing in order to feed itself on the frog. You are the frog and you are the grass snake. You are the poor child in Uganda, having nothing to eat. Their legs are as thin as a bamboo stick. You are him but you are also the merchant of arms selling deadly weapons to Uganda. Our countries, America, France, Germany, produce everyday products, guns, to sell to these countries. We know that the little child does not need guns. They do need something to eat. We are that child, starving, and we are also the arms merchant who is trying to sell arms to Uganda. We have to be one with all who suffer. We are those who have to survive with drugs. And we are those who try to prevent the drugs from being brought into the country.

We are everyone. The suffering is immense. And we have to identify with all of them. And yet, we do not get drowned into the ocean of suffering because we have all the *bodhisattvas*, great beings, with us. Everyday we have to touch the earth in order to see that oneness, the interconnectedness between us and all these living beings. Out of that compassion will flow. We will know what to do and what not to do in order not to make the situation worse, to bring relief to the situation. I practice touching the earth every day. And I wish that my friends also would practice touching earth every day in order to get connected. When you get connected, all of your mental problems, mental disease will vanish. You will no longer feel cut off and alienated from the world.

[Bell]

The third prostration, the third touching the earth, is represented by a circle and this consists of giving up ideas. You know that ideas make us suffer a lot, so we try to give up ideas. Like, your idea of happiness. You have one idea of happiness and you have to look deeply into that idea to see whether that idea of happiness has made you happy or has made you unhappy. That idea may be adopted by a nation. One nation may think that this the only way to get their country happy, the people happy, and then that country is committed to that idea, that ideology for fifty years, seventy years. And there is no happiness. And finally, they release the idea. It may be too late, but I don't think it's too late, because when you abandon the idea, you have a chance. You think in order to be truly happy you have to be this, to be that, to have this, to have that, and that is very dangerous. You are committed to one idea of how to be happy and you get stuck. Happiness can come from every direction. You have to allow yourself to be free, because you have many chances to be happy. Happiness can come in one or another form, several kinds of forms. If we are committed to only one idea of happiness, we lose a lot of chances. Have you thought of looking deeply into the nature of your idea of happiness? Maybe if you can abandon your idea of happiness, you will become happy very soon.

The third touching the earth is the practice of giving up ideas. There are many ideas to be given up and today we have a chance to consider only a few. This is very important in Buddhist teachings. First of all, this body is me. The idea that this body is me, is mine, is one that we have to get rid of. You can succeed very easily, because you have already practiced the first touching and the second touching. You have begun to see that this body is not your body. This body is the body of your ancestors as well and this body is the body of your children and grandchildren. The young people in the West, they make declarations that I cannot understand. They say that this is my body. I can do what ever I want with my body. I am free. I am adult. I am more than 18 years old, so I have the freedom to anything with my life, namely with my body. So, to use drugs to commit suicide, that is my right. But according to this teaching, you don't have that right. I think legislators have to think about this. I would plead with you, those who make legislation, to reconsider, because to my insight, this body is not me, is not mine. This body I have received from my ancestors, my parents, and I have to take good care of it. Otherwise, I betray my ancestors, I betray my parents. If I use drugs; if I use alcohol; if I destroy myself; if I commit suicide, I betray all my ancestors and my parents and I also betray my children and my grandchildren. The laws in many countries supports the idea that I have sovereignty over this body. I don't think that this is a good insight. You have a duty to take good care of your body, to keep it healthy and to transmit it to your children and grandchildren. The law should be on that line of thinking.

The Buddha said, "This body is not me. I am not confined to this body. I am life without boundary." So when this body is no longer there, I continue because I am not this body. I am much larger than this body. I am my ancestors; I am my disciples; I am my friends. I have transmitted the best of me to them, so why do I have to stop to be? So the idea that this body is me, this life span is me, you have to remove. The idea that I was born on this date. On this date I began to be. And in the future, on such and such date, I will die, I will stop being. Life span is an idea that we have to give up. Before this birth date I did not exist. And after this death date, I will no longer exist. I exist only from here to here—what an idea! The idea about a life span, the idea that this body is me. This life span is my life. Most of us are caught in that.

In fact, you are not bound to this body. You are not bound to birth and death. Your true nature is no-birth and no-death. And that is the best thing you can realize with Buddhist meditation. You have to touch your true nature of birth and death. The wave has to touch water. The wave has the right to be a wave, yes, but a wave has the right to be the water also. But if the wave knows she is water, she will not be upset anymore. She will not be afraid anymore of the so-called birth and death. So you think that from here to here you are and from here on, you are not. This is to be and this not to be. Who said, "To be or not to be, that is the question?" The Buddha said, "To be, or not to be, that is not the question!" The question is whether you know the nature of interbeing. So, the third prostration is very deep. It consists of releasing the idea of you are this body and this life span is the only time when you are, when you can be. Our ancestors are there alive. Our children are already there alive. This prostration, this touching the earth will help you touch the ultimate dimension, touch nirvana, touch the kingdom of God. Please train yourself. Practice more, learn more about the three prostrations and do them every day. You will release a lot of your pain, suffering and fear.

Today everyone is requested to participate in walking meditation. I will offer some instructions on walking meditation. We will gather around the linden tree, and there will be a microphone with which I can give some instructions on how to enjoy walking. Then after that we will participate in a formal meal, because today we want to show you how the monastics

eat a meal during the retreat season. The monastics have at least one long retreat every year, called rain retreat, and in Plum Village we make the winter our three month retreat. Some of you have been on winter retreat here in Plum Village. In Buddhist countries we always have this kind of formal meal, at noontime, during the rain retreat.

We will eat together in this hall, and we eat in such a way that the energy of the sangha will penetrate into every one of us. We eat in silence. We focus our attention on the food and on the sangha. We eat in such a way that peace and joy is possible and we have reduced the rituals to the minimum, but still you can see something. If you have learned, you know what to do when you fill your bowl with food, practicing breathing in, breathing out. There is a poem for you for when the bowl is empty. There is a poem for you to breathe in and out when you serve the food. And there is a poem for you to sit down beautifully. In Buddhist monastic life, poetry is everywhere. You use poetry as a means of practicing mindfulness.

When you put your bowl in front of you, you begin to practice like sitting meditation, enjoying the sitting, the breathing, while waiting for other brothers and sisters to come in. Don't lose any minute of your time waiting, just enjoy breathing in, breathing out, enjoying the fact that you are here in Plum Village practicing with the sangha. There will be some chanting in the beginning. The monks and nuns will offer food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos and to all living beings in the cosmos. That's a way of linking to every living being. They will hold their bowls like this. They use their left hand and make this *mudra* and they will place the bowl on the two fingers and these two fingers will serve to make it stable. And they hold the bowl on the level of their eyes, like this. And with their right hand they make the *mudra* of peace, and they put it like this and they chant, "I offer this food to all Buddhas and *mahasattvas* in the whole cosmos. I offer this food to the living beings in the realms of humans, animals, vegetables, etc. And you will notice that they have a spoon and the spoon is usually made of wood. Nowadays, they make it in plastic. To avoid the noise, you see. If you are using your fork or a spoon, please double your mindfulness. Because in monastic sitting, the meal is very quiet, very soft.

So every movement should be followed by mindfulness and it must be beautiful. It must be mindful, and we chew our food 30 times at least and we know what we are chewing. When you chew, don't chew your projects, your sorrow, your fear. You only chew what is inside your mouth, namely carrots, tofu, rice and bread and be aware that this is an ambassador coming from the cosmos to you, helping to nourish you. Just put your attention on your food and from time to time stop and look at the sangha and realize that you are protected by the sangha. You are among brothers and sisters who practice the same and you get the energy you need. Eat every morsel of food like you eat the piece of bread in the Eucharistic celebration. In each piece of bread there is the sunshine, there is the cloud, there is the earth, there is everything. And if you chew like that that is meditation, very deep. And you should radiate happiness and joy and all of us will profit from your presence. The spoon, before the offering, will be facing outward. Suppose this is the spoon and the monk will place it in the bowl facing outward. And after the offering, he will take it and place it inward. Now the food is for him, but before, it is for an offering. And then there will be a novice bringing a container of water and a few grains of food to the window and recite a gata to offer that food to living beings who are hungry. This is a symbol that when you eat, you have to think of the people, the animals who are starving.

In the time of the Buddha, one day a small snake came to take refuge close to the Buddha because there was a big bird trying to eat her. And the Buddha said to the bird, "Go away," but the bird did not accept this. So the Buddha said, "I will share with you some of my food,

but leave that snake alive.” And then the bird accepted. So, this story is known. The Buddha said before you eat, you put aside a little bit for the animals. It has become a tradition that in formal meals we always offer some food to the ants, the birds and so on. So the novice will be going to a window and chanting a gata in four lines and you will see it. And then the Five Contemplations. We have reduced the ritual to a minimum because you are not used to it, and I hope that you enjoy the formal meal. We organize a one here every week during the summer retreat. So everyone is invited for the walking meditation and the formal meal, all around. This is the only day of the retreat that all the hamlets are here together..

[Bell]

Watering Our Good Seeds

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 23, 1997 in Plum Village, France

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I have a topic for Dharma discussion for the young people today. You have organized in groups, speaking the same language, and we expect you to bring your insights to the sangha tomorrow. Twenty-four hours is not a lot. I don't like to set a deadline, if you are not ready tomorrow, then after tomorrow is all right. This is the Dharma discussion topic. Please remember.

Once upon a time there was a monk who was not happy. Maybe his name was *Freres Jacques*. You know the song, *Freres Jacques*? He was a lazy monk. He did not want to ring the bell in the morning. So, once upon a time there was a monk who was not so happy, and he blamed other monks for his unhappiness. He had a roommate, and his roommate was not happy either, because that monk always complained. He complained about this, complained about that. So sometime later the other monk asked to be moved to another room, to have another roommate.

Of course, like I do, you desire to help that monk to be happy so he would stop complaining. What can I do to help him? We have to find out. We are caught in a kind of dilemma, because I know if a person does not make people around him happy, he cannot be happy himself. And this applies not only to monks. If you are unable to make the people around you happy, how can you be happy? In the teaching of the Buddha I have learned one very basic thing: happiness is not an individual matter. Maybe some of you still believe that happiness can be sought by individuals, that we should just go and look for our own kind of happiness.

Happiness we believe can be an individual matter, but according to the teaching of the Buddha, our teacher, happiness is not an individual matter. If the other person is not happy, there is no way that you can be happy. Look. Consider a couple. The couple might be husband and wife. If the husband is unhappy, do you think that the wife can be happy? No, I don't think so. If the wife is unhappy, do you think that the husband can be really happy? No. So there is no point of looking for individual happiness. If you want you to be happy, you have to make the other person happy. Take the example of another couple, a father and a son. Do you think that if the father is unhappy, the son can be happy? No. If the son suffers so much, do you think that the father can be happy himself? No. That is why it is very realistic to see and to accept the fact that happiness cannot be an individual matter.

We have to practice looking deeply to really understand the teaching of the Buddha. A mother who is unhappy cannot make her daughter happy. If her daughter suffers so much, the mother will not be able to be happy herself. So it's clear that happiness is not a personal matter. Therefore, when we look at that poor monk we see that because he is not able to make the people around him happy, namely the other brothers, he cannot be happy. He seems to be trying to look for his individual happiness. But that is wrong. It is not in line with the teaching of the Buddha. So you might come to the conclusion that in order for that monk to be happy, he has to try to make the people around him happy, right? It seems logical. It seems clear that to be happy himself, he has to be able to make his roommate happy and other monks in the same monastery happy.

But there still is another problem. That is why I need you to practice looking deeply with me. How can an unhappy person make the people around him or her happy? Is there a way? He knows that if he cannot be happy, he cannot make people around him happy. He is motivated by the desire to make people around him happy, but because he has no happiness in himself, how could he share his happiness and make other people happy? Do you think that you have got the topic of the dharma discussion? That is a kind of dilemma. I need a young person to tell me whether I have presented the topic clearly enough.

I want you to spend one or two days sitting together, practicing breathing in, breathing out, deeply, doing walking meditation, in order to be calm, to be concentrated, and when you come together, you offer your insight as to how to help that monk. And the dilemma is that if that monk wants to be happy, he has to make people around him happy. The question remains that if he is unhappy, how can he make other people around him happy? And you grown up people, if you want to practice looking deeply to find out, you are welcome to do so.

Once upon a time there was an unhappy monk. That is the topic. But you can change the word “monk,” because it is not only a matter of monks and nuns. If you like, you can change it to an unhappy boy or girl, son or daughter, husband or wife. Chicolina, do you think it's clear enough? Good.

The last thing I would like to tell you today is that during the past week many children have practiced, have learned the practice of pebble meditation and the practice of inviting the bell of mindfulness to sound. I count on you, those who have been here one week, to help your friends who just arrived yesterday to learn about these two practices. At the end of this week they will be able to do as well as you do. Do you think that you can do it for us? Inviting the bell, and practicing the pebble meditation? Good. I think that is enough as an assignment today. Have a happy day. When you hear the bell, stand up and bow to the sangha before you leave to begin your practice.

[Bell]

Turn around to the sangha. Bow. Go slowly, beautifully, like flowers.

[Bell]

Dear friends, today is the twenty-third of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare, to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them in the depth of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness, sometimes earth consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in the mind, in the soil of

our consciousness, it is very hard for them to grow and manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering, confusion, prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go deep enough. Our intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and therefore to allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store in order for the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important. [Thây recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

The spring rain is falling gently
and the earth and the soil of my consciousness
is penetrated by the rain.
And the seed deep within me
now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of spirit, to allow the soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the Dharma rain, not using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare and to classify. That is very important. If we are already used to that kind of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to compare, to classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening to a Dharma talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy of Buddhism. They are two things, quite different. A lady who left us yesterday said that during one hour and a half, Thây said very much the same thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She was very hungry for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk is a time for practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma rain in such a way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated and can sprout and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the flower of compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to order to receive the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When you use a nylon sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma, and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always said, "That person got liberated. That person has understood. That person has been transformed." So transformation and hearing can be possible also during a Dharma talk. Don't believe that in a dharma talk you get the theory and then you go back to your tent and practice. No. Listening to a dharma talk is also a form of practice. That is why we have to sit in such a way that we are really present, body and consciousness at the same time. We have to dwell in the present moment. We have to allow ourselves to be available to the Dharma and the Dharma will be available to us.

Even if you feel sleepy and sit there dozing in the Dharma hall, it's much better than using your intellect. Yes, this is true, because even if you are sleeping, the Dharma talk has a way of penetrating you, but if you use your intellect, it is very difficult. Maybe you have had experience with someone in a coma. If you talk to her, she has a way of listening. She is present in a way that she can be receptive when you talk to her. When you allow your intellect to rest, many beautiful things can penetrate into you and you get a transformation.

There are people who after listening to a Dharma talk have felt liberated, light, joyful, and they didn't have to do much. They didn't have to listen hard or make any effort. They just opened themselves up to the Dharma to entered. That is why we should consider the one hour and a half listening to the Dharma talk as a time of practice. It may be very important.

The other day I was talking about holiness and I said that the nature of holiness can be understood, can be recognized. We call someone "His Holiness" or "Her Holiness." But what makes us call him or her by that title "Holiness"? There is, or there may be, the substance of holiness in that person. In the Buddhist tradition the substance of holiness is mindfulness.

When I wrote *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, I said that mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha that is in you and its nature is the same nature as the Holy Spirit, because where there is mindfulness, there is life. Where there is attention, there is life. When you drink a glass of orange juice in mindfulness, you are real and the juice is real, and because you and the juice are real, life is real. If you drink your orange juice in forgetfulness, you are caught by your anger, your jealousy; you are caught by the past, by the fear of the future, you are not really there for your orange juice and your orange juice is not really there for you. So you and orange juice, both of you are not real, and therefore, life is not real at that moment.

So to drink mindfully means to be alive again, to live deeply that moment of orange juice drinking. Since the energy of mindfulness is in you, the energy of holiness is in you. Where there is mindfulness there is life, your presence and the presence of life in you. Then if you continue to contemplate mindfulness, you will see that you will become more concentrated. Yes, you drink mindfully your orange juice, you are concentrated, even if your juice is not concentrated. Every step you make when you practice walking meditation makes you concentrated. You touch life deeply every step you make. So mindfulness is there and concentration is there, also.

Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of concentration. If you are concentrated, you are strong. When you look deeply, you touch deeply, and because you are able to look deeply and touch deeply, you get insight. You understand the nature of what is there: the object of your touching, the object of your looking. Therefore, the energy of concentration carries itself. The energy of insight is a liberating factor. If we suffer because we don't understand, because we are overwhelmed by illusion, ignorance, once we get insight we no longer suffer. We are no longer angry and suspicious. Therefore, our insight is the liberating factor, and without concentration and mindfulness, insight would not be possible. That is why I said that the energy of mindfulness is the vehicle transporting concentration and concentration carries itself.

Prajna is insight. Concentration is *samadhi*, and mindfulness is *smrti*. *Smrti*, *samadi*, and *prajna* are the three steps of training in the Buddhist path. Our practice is recognizing the seed of mindfulness in us. In holy people, there is a seed of mindfulness, but in all of us there is also a seed of mindfulness. If you practice recognizing that seed deep in our consciousness and help it to grow and to manifest often, the energy of mindfulness increases all the time and it is the substance of holiness in us. So, first of all, the practice is to recognize that we do have that seed deep in our consciousness and this is easy because every one of us is able to drink our juice mindfully. Every one of us is able to look at a flower mindfully. Every one of us is capable of breathing in mindfully. So the seed of mindfulness is really there, deep inside of us. We don't live our daily life mindfully because we have not allowed that seed of mindfulness in us to be touched every day by ourselves and by the people around us. We have not been able to make it grow and become important in our lives.

The practice of mindfulness is first of all to recognize that seed and to do everything for that seed to be touched every day and to become a source of energy that will make us more alive in our daily life. When we know how to live mindfully, we live concentrated. And if we live concentrated, we begin to understand deeply. When we understand deeply, we suffer much less. If these three kinds of energies are within us, we are a holy person. We have no complex about that, because we know exactly what holiness means.

Holiness is something we can recognize. It is not abstract. If we look at a person and we know that she is mindful, she is alive, she is concentrated in each moment of her daily life, she is able to understand, to be compassionate, to forgive, then we know that holiness is in her. You can call her “Your Holiness.” No complex. Holiness is not a title conferred to someone just by society, but by the fact that we are able to generate the energy of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

[Bell]

The bell of mindfulness was created to help us touch the seed of mindfulness and make it manifest. Every time we hear the sound of the bell, we go back to our breath and we breathe mindfully. Mindfulness of breathing nurtures the energy of mindfulness in us. It's easy to practice if you are surrounded by a sangha, brothers and sisters who do the same. In Plum Village, every time you hear the bell, you see all the brothers and sisters going back to their breathing and enjoying their in-breath and their out-breath. You will do the same in a very natural way. In a few weeks, you will get the habit, the good habit of going back to your mindful breathing.

The same is true with your mindful walking. In Plum Village everyone walks mindfully. Each step is an opportunity for us to touch the seed of mindfulness in us. We enjoy every step we make. Before the practice, we only know how to run. We run because we think that happiness is not possible now and here. We have to run to the other end where happiness may be available. We have a long, long habit of running. We run even in our dreams. Our ancestors have run, and they have transmitted their habit of running to us and we shall transmit the habit of running to our children.

When we come to Plum Village, we learn that happiness is available in the here and the now. Why to you have to run? To breathe in and out feeling that you are alive, and to make a step feeling that walking on this beautiful planet is already a miracle, is enough for you to be happy right now. You don't need another condition to be happy. So learning to be happy here and now with the conditions of happiness that are already available, this is what we learn in Plum Village. That is why everyone tries to block the old habit of running. Blocking in a very nice way, not by fighting, but by initiating a new habit, the habit of walking like a free person, like a happy person. In the beginning you might pretend to be a free person, a happy person, because the habit is so strong, but after a few days being in the sangha, you know that you can do it, you can enjoy every step you make. You say, “It's so simple! Why didn't I know about it? Just breathe in, make a step, smile and you can be happy.” Some people still wonder, “How could it be so simple?” Something this simple might not be true, because we are used to complicated things. There is a person who was reading one of my books in a bus, and after reading it—it's a very short book—she closed it and began to practice right on the bus. She felt wonderful, because she didn't believe that truth is something very complicated.

Every two years we have a 21-day retreat here in Plum Village and everyone has to attend the whole retreat. We don't go in and out like in the summer opening here. On the first day, everyone is offered a sticker that they can put on their shoes. The sticker says, "I walk for you." If you can make a peaceful step and get nourishment from that step, get peace and joy from making that step, not only do you make yourself healed, transformed, joyful, but you make other people happy, also. When you are happy you have something to share. When you are happy, you can make people around you happy. Our parents may not have had the chance to enjoy mindful breathing, mindful walking, and they hurried for all their life. They didn't know how to enjoy their in-breath, out-breath, relaxation, and dwelling happily in the present moment. Now, we have a chance to learn it so that every breath I take in, I feel freedom, I feel relaxation, I feel peace.

I breathe in not only for me but I breathe in for all my ancestors. Practicing looking deeply, I know that all my ancestors are still alive in me, present in me. I am the continuation of my ancestors. Therefore I breathe in and I invite my mother, my father, my grandfather to breathe in with me. It's wonderful. I practice for them. I also practice for my children, because anything I do to me, I do to my ancestors, I do to my children. That awareness keeps me alive, keeps me on the right path. I wouldn't like to do anything that is harmful to my ancestors, to my children, to my grandchildren. That is love.

I have many children and grandchildren—many disciples, monastics and lay. I know if I am not mindful, they will suffer so much. So every step I make is for them. Every breath I take is for them. I should nourish myself with peace, with joy, for the sake of my ancestors, for the sake of my children and their children. Every step I make, every breath I take, is the practice of love. That is why we distribute the sticker, "I walk for you." So it is your duty to make a step in a relaxing way to feel that you are alive. It is a privilege to be alive, to be still walking on this beautiful planet, to touch peace and love within ourselves. One step is very much, because if you are able to make one step, you will be able to make two, and so on. I walk for you. I walk for my parents, my ancestors. Many people have brought their stickers home and continued their practice.

I have said that the practice should help us to recognize the seed of mindfulness in us and help it to manifest in our breathing, in our walking, in our eating, in our conversation and so on. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is the substance of a Buddha. The Buddha is not something vague, a god, or just one person. The Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that is inherent in every one of us and we can make the Buddha in us grow apparent, strong. That light can shine on our life and help us to go in the direction of love, the direction of understanding.

The training here helps increase the capacity to be mindful. Yes, you are capable of being mindful, but we want you to increase that capacity. Every time you drink water and juice and tea, we want you to drink in mindfulness, not just from time to time. Every time you walk, we want you to walk mindfully, not just from time to time. The sangha is here to remind you, to support you. During the time that you are here with your sangha, please use the opportunity to really practice. Whether you go from your tent to the bathroom or to the kitchen or to the meditation hall, adopt only one style of walking, walking meditation. Take more time and enjoy the walking.

In Plum Village, the monks and the nuns, all of them sign a treaty with their stairs. In your home there may be stairs, because you go up to sleep there and then in the morning you go down. There are days when you have to go up and down your stairs several times. When you

sign a treaty with the stairs, you want to go up and go down only with peaceful, mindful steps. I have a hermitage very close to here and there are stairs. In 18 years I always go up and go down mindfully, enjoying every step. Never I have betrayed my treaty, violated my treaty. It has helped me. Now I can climb the Gridhrakuta Mountain, I can climb the Wu Tai Shan Mountain. I can climb any mountain, and everywhere I walk, including railway stations and airports, I walk in the same style: walking meditation, enjoying every step. I have quit running.

After signing that treaty, you have to respect it. Halfway up the stairs if you realize that you have not been walking mindfully, stop and go down again. Begin anew, breathing in, a step, and breathing out, another step, enjoying. It is very important. If you don't have stairs, then you can sign a treaty with a distance: for instance, the path that leads from your house to the bus station. You make a vow: from your house to that place you always walk mindfully. And if halfway you know that you have made unmindful steps, you go back. You walk again. Don't make it too long, to begin with. You will see the wonderful effect of such a practice on your life. Some years later you will find that you are walking the same way everywhere. You do that not only for yourself; no, you do it for all of us, for your children, for your ancestors, also.

There are many, many pleasant ways of doing it. There are several gathas like the one we sang here this morning. There are many wonderful gathas in Plum Village. Please learn them from your dharma teachers, from your brothers and sisters in the dharma. And practice with several gathas instead of just one. Like when you breathe in, you make two steps, “flower, flower”; and when you breathe out, you make another two steps, “fresh, fresh.” Or if you want to go faster, you make three steps: “flower, flower, flower; fresh, fresh, fresh.” But don't do it mechanically. Don't say the word—practice it. When you say, “flower, flower, flower,” you have to be a flower. When you say “fresh, fresh, fresh,” you have to make freshness into a reality. Otherwise, what are you doing?

After a few minutes, you may change to “mountain, solid.” Breathing in, you say, “mountain, mountain,” and you transform yourself into a mountain. You are walking with dignity. Each step is stability. You are not running. There are animals who walk like that, very majestically. The Buddha, also, he walked like that. The monks and the nuns during the time of the Buddha used to hold a begging bowl and they walked like that. They radiate peace. People who saw them, many of them knelt down on the sidewalk, because people need this kind of stability and peace. So when you walk like this, you generate the energy of peace and stability within you and you inspire all of us. If it happens that I lose my awareness and I get into a hurry and I see you walking like that, your sight will be a bell of mindfulness bringing me back to myself and there I am walking beautifully again. That is why every one of us should make a contribution to the sangha by his way or her way of walking and listening to the bell. Together we generate a powerful source of mindfulness that will penetrate into every one of us.

When I first came to America, I heard people say that a retreat should have no more than 30 people, otherwise it would not be serious. I didn't believe that too much, because I knew that if everyone in the retreat is mindful and if you combine the mindfulness of a large number of people, it will be very powerful. Everyone who happens to be there will be penetrated by the tremendous amount of energy emanating from the crowd. There were times when we practiced walking meditation with two thousand two hundred people in America. The people who came for the Day of Mindfulness had been in retreats and their practice was quite solid.

There was no noise at all; there was no disorder at all. Everyone was walking mindfully, and it was very powerful. The energy penetrated each of us.

So if all of us, 300 or 400, know how to enjoy walking, generating stability and joy, then the collective energy will be powerful and every one of us will inherit, will profit from, that kind of energy. Each of you is needed. We need your contributions to the collective energy of the sangha and walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing things mindfully is the way to do it. That practice helps increase the capacity to be mindful in us and in the people around us. Also, the practice in Plum Village helps to increase the capacity to keep mindfulness alive. Yes, all of us are capable of being mindful, but our mindfulness vanishes very quickly. We need the sangha to keep our mindfulness alive for a longer time.

When you are mindful, concentrated, you are a Buddha. But many of us are part-time Buddhas only. We have to learn how to be a full-time Buddha, and that is our path. The old energy always pushes us in the opposite direction—forgetfulness. In order to counter that old energy, you have to create a new habit energy, the habit energy of being mindful. A very nice way, there is no war. There is only a transformation. Meditation is not a fight, even against the old habits, the negative things. To meditate means to embrace the negative. But you need to have something in order to embrace: what is embracing what? It is the new habit, it is the new energy generated in you, that would be the agent which embraces the old habit.

In the first dharma talk given here, I said that the old habit energy is very strong. Many times we did not want to do it, many times we did not want to say it. We knew that if we said it, if we did it, it would cause damage. But finally we did it, we said it. We regret it very much later on. We are determined that next time we will not do it, we will not say it, but when the circumstances arise we do it again, we say it again. It has caused a lot of damage within us. We are frustrated because we have the feeling that it is stronger than us, in fact it is stronger. Because our mindfulness is too weak. That is why we come together and practice touching the seed of mindfulness, helping it grow, learning how to increase our capacity of being mindful, our capacity of keeping our mindfulness alive. When we have that energy, we have something with which to embrace those old bad habits, the negative things. And embracing them long enough, we will diminish the power of the negative. It is like the heat in the home. When we want to refresh the atmosphere in the home we turn the air conditioning on. The cool air isn't going to fight the hot air. The cool air comes and embraces the hot air, and it makes the hot air cooler. But the important thing is that the cool air must be continually generated. You cannot turn it on and then turn it off. So you have to learn how to keep mindfulness alive for a longer period of time so your mindfulness can have enough time to embrace your forgetfulness, your negative habit energy, with tenderness, and not with an intention to fight.

Every time your habit energy shows itself, begins to manifest, thanks to our mindful breathing, mindful walking, you recognize it, and you smile at it. You say, "I know that you are there, I am taking good care of you," and you embrace it. That's our practice: no fighting. You should know that we are not responsible for the habit energy all by ourselves. Many of these habits have been transmitted. Some of them have been transmitted by our mother or by our father, and when we see that energy coming up we can say, "Hello Mother, I know you are there. I will take good care of you." Then you are in good hands again. Mindfulness is the Buddha. The Buddha is taking care of you. Don't worry. You know how to invite the Buddha, and to keep him, keep her, with you. The techniques of walking, of breathing, of doing things mindfully, is what we learn while being in Plum Village.

We have to know a little bit about ourselves in order for the practice to be easy and natural, and according to the teaching of the Buddha we are made of five elements. There is a teacher of mathematics who trained here who went back to Toronto. When he resumed his classes, he wiped the board with mindfulness, slowly and peacefully. His students were very surprised. They asked him, "Are you OK, Daddy?" because he was very much in a hurry before. He turned around and said, "No, I'm OK, I'm trying to do it mindfully." I was wiping the board in mindfulness and his image appeared again to me.

Suppose we draw a circle here representing something like an orange, and suppose that the orange has five sections. So this is the first section, the second one, the third one, the fourth and the fifth. The first section of the orange represents our body, our form, *rupa*. Meditation has to do with our body. There are many sutras, many scriptures, about how to meditate on our body. The second section of the orange represents our feelings. To meditate is also to observe our feelings, to take care of our feelings, and we have to learn how. In Plum Village, we don't learn Buddhism, we learn only how to practice well.

Then we have our perceptions. To meditate is to become mindful of the perceptions, to look deeply into the perceptions, in order to see their nature. Mindfulness is intervening to shine light upon our perceptions. Many times our perceptions are wrong and mindfulness helps us to see that they are wrong. When we know that a perception is wrong, we are liberated. It is like when in twilight you see a snake, you get scared, you run, you scream, and when a friend brings a torch, you recognize that it's not a snake. It is only a piece of rope. That is a wrong perception. Wrong perceptions always create anger, fear, distress, and so on. That is why meditating on perceptions helps to dissipate a lot of suffering.

Mental formation is the fourth section of the orange. "Formation" is a technical term: it means things that are made by different elements, like this flower is a formation. If we look deeply into the flower, we see many components, like the rain, the sunshine, the clouds, the soil, the minerals, the farmer, the gardener, and so on. When something is made from different kinds of elements, that something manifests itself as the object of our perception, and it is called a formation. All formations are impermanent. Here we have business with mental formations. Fear is a mental formation. Craving is a mental formation. Compassion is also a mental formation. Love is a mental formation. There are many wholesome mental formations; there are unwholesome mental formations. In my tradition we distinguish fifty-one categories of mental formations. As a novice I had to learn them by heart: wholesome mental formations, unwholesome mental formations, and so on.

I have to tell you that feeling is also a mental formation, and perception is also a mental formation, but they are too important. That is why you have to single them out as a category. This kind of analysis is not for the sake of analysis. This analysis is for the sake of practice. You have to remember that if in the teaching of the Buddha there is an analysis, the analysis is to help you to see and to practice well. It does not mean that this is the only way to present reality. No. Buddhism is not there to give you the only way, the only description of reality. The teachers are there to help you to understand yourself and to practice well.

So feeling is one of the fifty-one mental formations, perception is another one, therefore this category has only forty-nine mental formations. These mental formations don't manifest all at the same time. If they do, I think we cannot be alive. Imagine the television set and every channel manifests at the same time: not possible. So just one or two, sometimes three, but I think three is the maximum. This section of the orange represents something like the screen of our television, or the screen of the computer. Let us use the image of the computer. So each

program appears on the screen of the computer, and you can bring some other things up to intervene. You can make a window, you can paste something in, for instance. If I lived in the time of the Buddha I could not give a dharma talk like this because they would not know what a computer is! So when they don't manifest, where are they? They must be somewhere, hidden somewhere, in order to manifest one by one like that. That is why we need the fifth section of the orange. It's called "consciousness."

Consciousness here means the lower part of our consciousness. In the Sarvastivada school it is called the base consciousness, the consciousness of the base. In Mahayana Buddhism we call it "store consciousness" because it has the capacity to store all the mental formations so that each of them will be able to manifest later as a mental formation.

I spoke to you at the beginning of the Dharma talk about this section of the orange: consciousness as the soil of the mind, containing all kinds of seeds. Each mental formation stays there in the form of a seed. A seed means something that has not manifested yet. That is the technical term "*bija*," seeds. So your anger is there in the form of a seed. Now you are not angry at anyone, you are fine, but that does not mean that anger is not in you. It is in you, but in the form of a seed only. You may think that anger is not in you, but that is not correct. If someone comes and says something, and touches that seed of anger, you will see that seed manifests itself and you will soon be overwhelmed by the energy of anger.

So *bija* is the seed, and we have all kinds of seeds in us, positive and negative. We have the seed of perfect enlightenment in us, that is the Buddha-to-be in us. We have the seed of Mara in us. We have the seed of holiness in us, and we have the seed of unholiness in us. So sometimes we may be called "His Holiness," sometimes "His Unholiness." The mind is a screen upon which every mental formation can be revealed. A good practitioner knows how to keep the negative seeds here [in the storehouse consciousness], and tries by his or her practice to help the positive seeds to manifest. If the positive seeds continue to manifest here, the negative seeds become smaller, smaller, less important. When they are tiny, not important, it is difficult for them to manifest. I don't get angry very often. Even when I get angry, you might not see it. You may say, "I have never seen Thây angry," and you believe anger is not in me. That is not true. The seed of anger is always in me, but since I practice I don't give it a lot of chance.

You also have to see things in terms of interbeing. When you practice do not entertain the hope that you will wipe out all the negative things in you. Please don't! It's like a gardener. She only wants to have flowers and no garbage in her garden. But it is a necessity for a flower to become garbage. You cannot keep a flower alive forever and ever. There will be a time when a flower has become a piece of garbage. The love in us can be like that, is like that too. But a good organic gardener is not afraid of garbage, because she knows perfectly how to transform the garbage back into flowers. Both flowers and garbage are made of organic matter. Mental formations are also organic. This is very interesting: all our mental formations are of an organic nature. That is why we can transform. Love can be transformed into hate. But if you have hate, don't be afraid. Learn, learn how to transform your hate back into flowers. Many couples after two, three years living together, see that their love has transformed into hate. In the beginning, "How can I survive without her?" But now, "How can I survive with her?"

So love has transformed into hate. But if we know the law of transformation, we know also that it is possible for us to transform garbage back into flowers. The hate, anger, if we know how, we can transform them. So may I urge you not to be afraid of your sorrow, your pain,

your afflictions. Don't be eager to throw them away, because it is exactly with these materials that you can fabricate the flower of understanding and love in you. That is the principle of nonduality that is so important in the Buddhist tradition. An organic gardener is not afraid of the heap of garbage. She is confident. She does not want to throw the garbage away because she knows that she is capable of transforming the garbage back into flowers, into lettuce, cucumbers. So smile to them, say "I know you are there, I am going to take good care of you and make you into flowers." Don't throw anything away.

So day is because night is. Enlightenment and affliction, they inter-are. It is like the lotus. Although they are fragrant, beautiful, refreshing, all of them grow from the mud. But they don't smell like mud. That is why the Buddhists like very much to use the symbol of the lotus. You live in the world of afflictions, of suffering, and yet you are able to make use of them, to transform them. You live in the world, but you are not overwhelmed or affected by the world. Instead you can help the world to transform.

If you live in a couple, if you live in a family, if you live with another person or several persons, you may ask them to be careful. You may ask them to be aware of the seeds you have in your store consciousness. "Darling, I know that I have these negative seeds in me. And every time these seeds manifest, I make myself suffer and I make you suffer, also. So, please, if you love me, if you care for me, be careful not to water these seeds in me." Among lovers, there should be such an agreement. That is the practice. "Darling, if you really love me, water the positive seeds in me, because I do have the seeds of understanding, of compassion, of forgiveness, of joy in me. Even if they are still small, if you know how to touch them in me every day, I become a much happier person and when I am happy, you don't have to suffer as much."

If you really understand what your store consciousness is, you understand yourself. If you understand the person you love with her weaknesses and her strengths, you would know what we call the practice of selective watering of seeds. Refrain from watering the negative seeds in him. Try your best to identify and to water the positive seeds in him every day, and you will see the situation will improve in just one week. The degree of happiness will increase very quickly, especially when you are supported by brothers and sisters within the practice to show you the way.

Consciousness sometimes is called *sarva bija*. "Bija" means seeds and "sarva" means all, all seeds. This is the totality of the seeds that are in you, the consciousness of the totality of the seeds.

When you live mindfully, you will be able to identify each variety of seeds that is about to manifest. When there is a stimuli and a seed is about to manifest, you know already and you immediately begin the practice of mindful breathing and walking. Stop everything else. This is very important. If you don't, the seed will manifest. When the seed manifests it is still possible for you to practice, but it is better that you practice when it is about to manifest. If you can do that it means that you have been practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing for several weeks. When a seed is about to be agitated, to be watered, you know and you put yourself in a state of being alert and you practice. You practice for you, yes, but you practice for him, for her. She will be grateful for you because you know how to take care of yourself, because taking care of yourself is to take care of him or her.

"I walk for you, I breathe for you." Selective watering of seeds is your practice and it does not take a long time. You can transform your situation very quickly.

Overcoming the Fear of Death

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 28, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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My dear friends,

Today is the twenty-eighth of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I remember in the old time, about ten years ago, there was a little boy who came to Plum Village to practice. He spent one day in Plum Village and then two days in Plum Village and then he liked it. There were a lot of children practicing and playing with him. So during a tea meditation, rather lemonade meditation, he said "Everything is wonderful here except one thing—there is no television." But he survived. Survived and then he continued and stayed several weeks in Plum Village. One of his conclusions before leaving Plum Village: that it is possible to survive without television. You can have many kinds of joy and you can nourish yourself with these joys. You don't need television. I am not against television. There are many wonderful programs. I only call for attention because there are many programs of television that are not very healthy to us. They bring us so many toxins.

There was another boy who arrived in Plum Village and he found it too quiet. Many hundred people staying here and yet too quiet and he wanted to leave right away. I think his parents had negotiated with him that if he would stay in Plum Village for one week, then they would bring him to the seashore for two weeks. He thought that was a good deal—one week in Plum Village and then two weeks at the beach. But when he arrived in Plum Village, he found it so calm that he didn't like it at all. He hated it and he wanted to go right away. He was very strong, very determined and his parents were in despair because his parents loved Plum Village and they wanted very much to practice in Plum Village. So they were about to give up and leave Plum Village with their child. Suddenly Sister Chang Khong appeared and she said, "Okay, you can leave, but stay just for one hour." Then she brought a few children to come and play with him and he liked it and he accepts to stay for one day. He was a special person to be taken care of, so other children were asked to take care of him. He got the attention of other young people and he liked it. He found that the children here are very nice—kind to him. So he accepted to stay for another day and then he extended it to several days. The young man liked it and he agreed to stay for one whole week. At the end of the week, he proposed to his parents to stay on. He didn't want to go to the beach anymore. He wanted to stay in Plum Village for two more weeks.

I think it is possible to be happy without watching television a lot. Again, I want to say that I am not against television, because we can profit a lot from television. But we should have an intelligent policy. I think that the family should get together and discuss how to use the television. Everyone has to be present and we should agree on what kind of programs we should view and what kind of programs we should not view. I think we should have a TV magazine to find out what we can see and what we should not see.

I know a family in Boston. They selected the programs of television very carefully. If they see in the program a very good film, they agree that everyone should be present to view the film together. Grandma, Daddy, Mommy, everyone wears their best dress and goes to the living room and sit very comfortably and watches television, like going to the cinema, it's like a ritual. Imagine, Grandma puts on her best dress and wants all her grandchildren to come and sit close to her. She is very happy. Watching that film alone would not make her as happy as watching together with the whole family.

In our modern times, the family does not have a lot of chance to be together. Sometimes people eat at different times. That is a pity. We should arrange so that we eat together as a family at least once a day. Is that too much—once a day? We should practice walking meditation, together the whole family, at least once a week. If you live near the beach or the bank of the river, or a woods, it would be wonderful if the whole family could organize a walking meditation together for thirty or forty-five minutes. That is my wish. We can bring some of the things that we practice at Plum Village home, like together doing a session of total relaxation in the living room. Everyone has to learn how to conduct such a session. Even if you are still very young, you can conduct a session of total relaxation. As you know, for sitting meditation, you don't have to sit a lot. You sit for a number of breaths only breathing in, breathing out. You may like to use pebble meditations. Adults can also practice pebble meditations with their children. So I rely, I trust, that you use your intelligence to organize the practice at home. We count on you very much.

When I was in Italy a few months ago, I gave a retreat where there were many children. There was a little girl who had a little sister and hated her. One day she told her parents, "Why don't we kill her?" She meant her younger sister. Because people are inclined to eliminate the things they don't like. We live in a technological world. There are many quick ways to eliminate what we don't want. A sister wants to kill her younger sister because she does not get along with her, she was so demanding. It upsets me a lot when I hear the story.

I think in television you watch programs like Power Rangers. In that series, Power Rangers, you have the power to destroy everything that you don't like, and of course there are many things that we don't like around us. There was a little girl who pointed a toy gun at her mother and said, "I want to shoot you down." When we have something wrong within our body, we have the tendency to open our body, cut it, and throw it out. We call it surgery. We want to do it quickly. We don't know that there are many other ways. We don't know how to embrace the block of pain in us, to take care of it, so that it can be transformed. We only think of throwing away, eliminating with guns, with knives, scissors, and things like that. What a civilization we have. Therefore we have to think deeply about this and watching television can increase our bad tendency of wanting to eliminate whatever we don't want.

Television can increase your craving, your fantasy, and it does not help you to understand the hardships, the difficulties, of your parents and so on. Many programs can increase your violence, your anger, your wish to eliminate whatever you don't like. Your inability to embrace, to forbear, to help. That is why we need to look deeply. I urge that the whole family get together and have a deep discussion on this. After five days of retreat, the girl was transformed deeply because we especially took care of her. With the whole sangha and the sangha of young people, we had a very good program for young people at that retreat. When she got back to school she wrote a story about David and Angelina that got her a very high note from the teacher. That evening when her baby sister cried instead of kicking her or beating her, she said, "Be quiet. I am here for you my sister." She practiced the second mantra, by herself, alone. I can see in that little girl there are so many good seeds, but because of watching so many bad television programs, the good seeds had not been able to manifest. These programs only water the bad seeds in her. Going into a retreat where the setting is quite different, she was able to practice some quiet breathing, walking, surrounded by people who are calm. All these things have helped touch the good seeds within the child. Five days, only five days, helped her to transform and she became a very lovely sister.

So I am not pessimistic. I know the good seeds are in every one of us. If we have the opportunity to take care of the young people, they grow up beautifully. Mindfulness helps us to look more deeply and to reorganize our daily life. We should not allow ourselves and our children to get intoxicated every day. This is the true practice, the concrete practice, of the five mindfulness trainings and the children can very well practice it. If the adults practice, the children will follow.

One lady in England told me that during more than ten years she had the habit of taking two glasses of wine and nothing bad has happened to her. She said that she cannot take the fifth mindfulness training because she does not want to abandon her two glasses of wine, which are so good. She used many pretexts: "You know, Thay, wine is part of our civilization?" and so on. She talked a lot. She was trying to defend herself a lot. I was sitting very quietly and I did not say anything. I saw that she was very tempted to take all five mindfulness trainings. She was struggling till the last minute. Finally, I said, I know you are going to take all the five mindfulness trainings tomorrow. You say no tonight, but tomorrow you will do so. Because I know that you know very well that you are taking the five mindfulness trainings not only for yourself, but for your children. Because two glasses of wine have done no harm to you, but who knows what happens with your children. Maybe two glasses of wine can make one of your children become an alcoholic person, because your children are not exactly like you. So if you refrain from these two glasses of wine, the children will look up to you and they will naturally refrain from drinking wine.

I know children who smoke. That is because the parents smoke. So let us think like this: we practice not only for ourselves, but for our ancestors, and for our children. We practice as a *bodhisattva* for the sake of everyone; for our society, also. The next morning she took all five precepts.

So let us make a vow, make a determination, to live in such a way that can help so many people. Because when we've got that determination, there is a strong source of energy born in us and that energy will protect us from doing things that are wrong. That source of energy in Buddhism, we call *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, the mind of awakening. It makes you alive, and children, also. They can have a strong mind of love, mind of understanding. I have seen many young people support their parents and help their parents to come back to the practice. So I have faith. I wish today you will discuss a little bit on this. Your insight about the question I proposed five, six days ago was very good, wonderful.

An unhappy person, to make other people happy, to love other people, has to take care of and love himself or herself first. In Plum Village, we offer him, we offer her, the way to breathe, to walk, to stop, to embrace the feeling of pain, of sorrow. Because when you know how to take care of yourself, when you know how to love yourself, then you know how to take care and to love other people. The Buddha said that taking care of yourself, loving oneself, is the basic thing, is the basic condition, for you to take care and to love all living beings. Of course, other people can help you practice, but you have to make efforts by yourself. Peace, happiness, and joy begin with myself and then I will get the support of other people around me. Then, later, I will be a source of support to other people around me.

[Young people] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow.

[Bell]

Yesterday, we talked a little bit about non-fear. The Buddha knows that there is fear in each one of us. That is why he urges us to touch our fear, to embrace it. Our fear of loneliness, our fear of being abandoned, our fear of growing old, our fear of dying, our fear of being sick, and so on. You have learned that every time we embrace our fear, it will lose some of its strength; otherwise, the blocks of fear will continue to be strong in the depths of our consciousness and continue to shape our behavior.

Non-fear is the true base for true happiness. We have been learning about *dana*, giving, generosity, and non-fear is the kind of gift that is considered to be the best, the most precious. If you can offer non-fear to someone, you offer the best kind of gift. The people who are dying may be very fearful. If you have non-fear with you, you sit with him or with her in that difficult moment of his life. You make him die peacefully without fear. This is a great gift. If you are someone who learns how to accompany the dying person, you have to cultivate your non-fear. Because without non-fear, you cannot be your best in order to help him, or help her.

There are three kinds of gifts spoken about in Buddhism. The first gift is piety. It means material gift. You give that in order to relieve the suffering of the people who are poor, who are destitute concerning the problem of housing, of food, of medicine.

The second kind of gift is the Dharma. With the Dharma, you can help people to relieve a lot of their suffering. You help people to know how to organize their lives, to do things in such a way that they can bring happiness to themselves and to their families, how to transform their suffering, how to love, and to help other people stop suffering.

Finally, the third kind of gift is called non-fear. I would like to tell you the story of a person who lived two thousand six hundred years ago, who was a lay disciple of the Buddha and who practiced giving, generosity, in such a way that he got a lot of happiness. Finally he got himself the gift of non-fear when he died because he died beautifully, peacefully, and his name is Anathapindika.

Anathapindika is one of the early lay disciples of the Buddha. Anathapindika is not his real name. His real name is Sudatta. Anathapindika is the name given to him by the people of his city because he was so generous. He was a businessman. But he wasn't so busy. He had time and energy to bring help to destitute people, the people who are alone. He used a part of his wealth to do the work of giving. It did not seem that he became less rich at all while doing so. He had a lot of friends in the business circle and he was loved by them, quite a lot. He did business with these people and got their trust and continued to help the people in his country a lot.

The first time he saw the Buddha was in the Venuvana. Venuvana means the bamboo grove in the kingdom of Magadha. He had a brother-in-law living in that city, the city of Rajagaha in the Magadha kingdom. He used to come to that city several times a year to do business. He himself lived in the kingdom of Kosala, north of the Ganges River. He had a family there. The capitol of Kosala is Sravasti. So from time to time, he left Sravasti in order to go to Rajagaha. When he was there, he always stayed at his brother-in-law's home.

One day he arrived and it didn't seem that his brother-in-law took good care of him at all, not like other times. His brother-in-law was busy arranging the house as if he was about to invite the king. So he asked the question, "Dear brother, why didn't you take care of me like the other times? What are you doing? Are you inviting the king to the house or something?" And

his brother-in-law said, "No, I am not inviting the king. I am inviting the Buddha." He had never heard of the Buddha. The Buddha is just a monk and some of his students.

It was the third year after his enlightenment and the Buddha was teaching in the Bamboo Grove. The Bamboo Grove had been given to him by the king of Magadha, King Bimbisara. There were more than a thousand monks already. Every time I thought of that moment of the career of the Buddha, I always felt a little bit of pity for the Buddha, because to have one thousand two hundred and fifty monks to take care of, that is big business. I am taking care of less than one hundred monks and nuns now, and I know that is not easy.

Sangha building: without big brothers, talented monks like Shariputra, Mollegana, the Buddha couldn't have been able to build a sangha of monks and nuns like he did. It is difficult. Sangha building is what every one of us has to learn. To build a happy sangha is for our support, our happiness. Your family is a sangha, itself. Building a sangha of practice is to build your own safety, your support, your happiness.

When Anathapindika heard the word "Buddha," he was struck, because he never heard such a name. Its a new name. "The Buddha, you mean?" "Yes, the Buddha." "It means the awakened one?" "Yes, it means the awakened one." So suddenly he felt in love with that name, that person. I don't know why. Things happen like that. You hear a name and suddenly you have a lot of sympathy. As if everything had been written before in your heart. And that word Buddha did not leave him?. He wanted to wait until tomorrow to see the Buddha and a number of disciples coming, but he couldn't wait. He had a hard time going to sleep at night. He woke up three or four times during the night thinking that it was already sunrise. Finally, he thought that the sun is rising. They did not have any clock then. He set out and said, "I am going to welcome the Buddha. Maybe I will see him on the street, because I know the way to Venuvana."

This year, a number of us from Plum Village, we sat in Venuvana for lunch with the Indian children just a few months ago. But it was not really the morning. He went alone and he continue to walk until he arrive at Venuvana. It was still very early in the morning. All the monks were still sleeping and it was dark in the bamboo grove. He sat down and suddenly he saw in the fog someone coming, although he did not see very clearly. Finally, he realized that this person may be the Buddha. So they had a few sentences in exchange and he was so happy to meet the Buddha and he recognized in the Buddha his real teacher. So they sat down for a conversation, about a half an hour only, and they love each other. He invited the Buddha to come to his kingdom for a teaching, the kingdom of Kosala.

That day, the Buddha went to the house of his brother-in law. After having lunch, he gave a Dharma discourse and that helped Anathapindika to learn more about the teachings of the Buddha. He was determined to invite the Buddha to come to his country to teach. The next day, toward the end of the day, he asked his brother-in-law to allow him to use his house to make an offering to the Buddha again. He wanted the Buddha to come the next day. After having visited the Buddha a few times, he got the agreement of the Buddha that the Buddha would go to the kingdom of Kosala, the city of Sravasti, to bring the teaching there.

He was so happy . He asked one of the monks to go with him to make the preparation. Shariputra, one of the high monks in the order, agreed to go with him. They set out on foot to go to the kingdom of Kosala. On the way, they spread the news that the Buddha, a great teacher, is coming and you have to prepare yourself in order to welcome him. When they got back to the city of Sravasti, he looked hard to find a piece of land, because he wanted to keep

the Buddha in his country. The Buddha is such a jewel. The Buddha may come and teach and may go back to Venuvana, and he wanted the Buddha to stay longer, much longer, in his kingdom.

He was looking very hard for a beautiful place. Finally he found a place, a beautiful park, very close to the city. He found out that the park belonged to Prince Jeta. He visited the prince and asked the prince to sell it to him in order for him to offer it to the Buddha and his congregation. Jeta said "Well, this park is my pleasure. The king has given it to me and I want to keep it for my own pleasure." Anathapindika talks about the Buddha. "If you consent to sell it to me, then I will make it into a beautiful practice center for the Buddha and his monks." And he insisted. Prince Jeta in order to dissuade him said, "Well, if you have enough gold to cover the ground of the park, then I will sell it to you. Anathapindika thought for one or two minutes and said, "Yes, I will do that. I will have enough gold to cover the park and I will buy it." And then the prince said, "That is a joke. That is a joke. I don't want to sell." But Anathapindika said, "Your excellency, you know that you are the crown prince and anything a person like you says should not be a joke. You have said so and I have agreed." He went and sought advice of a lawyer. Then the lawyer advised Jeta, the prince, to sell it to him because he had made a declaration as a joke.

So finally Anathapindika brought a cart of gold to come and cover the place. They so impressed Prince Jeta. "Who is the Buddha that this person agreed to spend all of his fortune to buy a piece of land for him?" He was so impressed that when the gold was spread about two thirds of the ground he said, "Well, I offer the third part. You don't have to bring any more gold. And I also offer all the trees in the park." That is why nowadays we call it the Anathapindika Park with the Jeta Trees.

Then quickly, he built the monastery. Very quickly, because he had found the object of his true love. He spent a lot of time, energy building the practice center for the Buddha and his monks. Anathapindika took a lot of pleasure serving the Buddha, serving the sangha. His family did not know anything about Buddhism. They had to learn a lot from other teachers. But this time, they were very united as a family. He had three daughters and one son. He also had a young brother named Subbutti. Subbutti later became a very illustrious monk. You learn about him in the *Diamond Sutra*. Subbutti, the one who practice the deep vision on emptiness.

They came to listen to the Dharma talk given by the Buddha at the Jeta Grove every week. The Jeta Grove became a very beautiful and famous practice center. The King of Kosala also came and listened and became a student and a very good friend of the Buddha. The King of Kosala was born in the same year as the Buddha. After he had become a student of the Buddha, he continued to learn and to practice. Finally they became very good, very close friends. You know that the Buddha died at the age of eighty. King Pasenadi of Kosala also died just a few months before the Buddha.

The third daughter of Anathapindika learned Buddhism very well. She practiced very well. She was wedded to a governor of a nearby country called Anga. The daughter introduced the governor to the teaching of the Buddha and he became a very good supporter of the Buddha Dharma, also. Anathapindika's family was a very happy family, and their happiness came from the joy of supporting the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha. They were very united with each other.

One day the Buddha learned that Anathapindika was very sick. That was about thirty years later. He went to visit Anathapindika. His beloved lay disciples. Anathapindika said that he

has only one thing that he is sorry about. He is very satisfied with his life, his family, his practice. He is only sorry about one thing: that he is too weak to come to the Jena Grove every week to listen to the Dharma talk. He wanted to be there at every Dharma talk of the Buddha. The Buddha said, "I will send my disciples to you, my disciples are me, to take care of you and help you to practice even if you cannot come to the Jena Grove." Venerable Shariputra was also a very close friend of Anathapindika. He used to come visit him very often and help him. One morning Shariputra learned that Anathapindika was dying. He thought that maybe this would be his last visit and he asked his younger brother in the Dharma, Ananda, to come along.

When they arrive, Anathapindika could not sit up in his bed. Shariputra said, "No my friend, don't try. Just lay down quietly. We will bring a few chairs close to you and we will be together." The first question he asked is "Dear friend, Anathapindika, how do you feel? Is the pain in your body increasing or has it begun to decrease?" Anathapindika said, "No, Venerables, the pain in me is not decreasing. It is increasing all the time." There upon, Shariputra proposed that three of them practice together the practice of the recollections of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Shariputra is one of the most intelligent disciples of the Buddha. He knew that Anathapindika received a lot of pleasure every time he served the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He wanted to water the seeds of happiness in the store consciousness of Anathapindika.

He began to invite Ananda and Anathapindika to breathe in and breathe out and focus their attention on the person of the Buddha, on the virtues of the Buddha. After that, they meditated on the Dharma, the Dharma that can bring relief right away. The moment you begin to practice you get calm, you get transformation right away. If you don't know how to practice mindful breathing, you cannot get the calm and the well-being, but if you know how to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, you begin to get some calm, some stability right away. The Dharma is something that does not require time, a lot of time. You can touch the Dharma. You can touch the effect of your practice right in this life, right today. The Sangha is a body of practitioners who are always there for you, supporting you every moment. Especially when you need her, the sangha is for you. So after the practice of the recollection on the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, Anathapindika restored the balance. He suffered much less and he was able to smile.

At that time, Shariputra proposed that they continue the practice. They practiced about looking deeply into their six sense organs, the objects of these six senses, and also the consciousnesses that arise from the contact between the six organs and the objects.

In *The Chanting Book of Plum Village*—this is an old version, the new version has been printed in America and will be available in a few months—there is a discourse called *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I would like to invite you to study this discourse. I translated the sutra from the Chinese, but I also consulted an equivalent text in the Pali canon.

Let us practice like this. Breathing in, I know that this body is not me. Breathing out, I feel I am not caught in this body. In fact, they begin with eyes. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—six things. They always begin with eyes. Breathing in, I know that these eyes are not me. I am not caught in these eyes. I am life without boundaries. These eyes have a beginning. These eyes can disintegrate, but I am not caught in these eyes. They begin with the eyes and continue with the nose, the ears, the tongue, the body, and the mind.

Then they switch to the objects of the six senses. These forms are not me. I am not caught in these forms. These sounds are not me. I am not caught in these sounds. Because the dying person may be attached to forms, sounds, body, mind, et cetera, considering these things to be self, considering that they are losing these, they are losing self.

After having meditated on the six senses and their objects and the six kinds of consciousnesses, they begin to meditate on the four elements. Breathing in, I know the element water is in me. Breathing out, I know that the element water is not me. I am not caught in the element of water. When you breathe and you meditate like that, you see that the water is everywhere, around you, inside of you. Water is not you. You are more than water. You are not caught by the element of water.

And you meditate also on the element of heat. The heat in me is not me. I am not caught by the heat in me. The heat is everywhere. You do not consider the heat to be yourself. Breathing in I realize the element of earth in me. Breathing out, I know that I am not the earth. The element earth is not me and I am not caught in the element called earth. So they continue like that with the elements air, with the four elements.

And they come to the five aggregates we have learned in the last few days: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Breathing in, I know that form is not me. I am not limited by form. Feelings are not me. I am not limited by feelings. Perceptions are not me. I am not caught by the perceptions. Mental formations are not me. I am not these mental formations. Consciousness is not me. I am not caught by this consciousness. Then they practice looking into the nature of causes and conditions?

Anathapindika was practicing because he knows the two monks very well. They are both beloved disciples of the Buddha and are sitting there to support him so he could do the meditation easily. First of all, he meditated in order to restore the balance in him so that the pain in him would not bother him too much. And finally he was concentrated enough in order to follow the other kind of meditation. “Friend Anathapindika, everything that is arises because of causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart.” These are very deep teachings. When the body arises, it arises. It does not come from anywhere. If conditions are sufficient, the body manifests itself and you perceive it as existing. When the conditions are no longer sufficient, the body is not perceived by you and you may think of it as not existing. In fact, the nature of everything is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Shariputra was giving the best teaching of the Buddha to Anathapindika in this very critical moment of his life. Everything that is comes to be because of a combination of causes. When the causes and conditions are sufficient, the body is present. When the causes and conditions are not sufficient, the body is absent. The same is true with ears, nose, eyes, tongue, and mind; form, sound, smell, taste, touch and so on.

These lines may be a little bit abstract to you, but it is possible for all of us to get a deep understanding, a deep experience of it. You have to know the true nature of death, the true nature of dying, in order to understand really the true nature of living. If you don't understand what is death, you don't understand what is life, also. Therefore, it is very important to know the nature of birth and death. The teaching of the Buddha is to relieve us of suffering and the base of suffering is ignorance, ignorance about the true nature of yourself, of things around you. Since you don't understand, you are too afraid and fear has brought you a lot of suffering. That is why the offering of non-fear is the best kind of offering you can make to someone.

[Bell]

We have ideas. We talk about it ,but we may not have a real understanding of the words we use, the ideas we have. In our mind, to die means from some one you suddenly become no one. You cease to be. You cease to exist. That is our understanding. In the same way, we think of birth as our beginning. What does it mean to be born? To be born means from nothing, you suddenly become something. From no one, you suddenly become someone. That is our definition of birth and death. Because of these notions, we have kept our fear in us for too long. The Buddha invites us to bring our fear up and look deeply into the object of our fear: fear of dying, fear of non-being. That is the cream of the Buddha's teaching. You cannot afford not to learn it because this is the best thing in the teaching of the Buddha.

There are many non-Buddhists who have discovered the reality of no-birth and no-death. Let us talk about, for instance, the French scientist Lavoisier. He looked deeply into the nature of things and he declared that nothing is born and nothing can die: “*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd.*” I don't think that he had studied Buddhist sutras.

Suppose we tried to practice with a sheet of paper because a sheet of paper is what we call a thing. Let us practice together like Anathapindika, Shariputra, and Ananda, looking deeply into this sheet of paper. You may think that the sheet of paper has a birthday and will have a day of dying. We may imagine a day when the piece of paper is produced from nothing, it suddenly becomes something, a sheet of paper. Is it possible? When you look into the sheet of paper in this very moment, you don't have to go back to someday. Just look at it in the present moment. Into the true nature of the paper you see what? You see that the piece of paper is made of non-paper elements. This is a very scientific way of looking, because you don't accept anything that is not evident.

When I touch the sheet of paper, I touch the tree, the forest, because I know that deep inside there is the existence of the trees, the forest. If you return the element tree back to the forest, the sheet of paper cannot be here. Right? I also touch the sunshine. Even at midnight touching the sheet of paper, I touch sunshine. Because sunshine is one element called non-paper elements that has made up the paper. Because without sunshine, no tree can grow. So touching the tree, I touch the sunshine.

I touch the cloud. There is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. You don't have to be a poet to see the cloud in a sheet of paper. Because without a cloud, there would be no rain and no forest can grow. So the cloud is in there. The trees are in there. The sunshine, the minerals from the earth, the earth, time, space, people, insects—everything in the cosmos seem to be existing in this sheet of paper. If you look deeply, you find that everything in the cosmos is present in this moment in the sheet of paper. If you send one of these elements back to its source, the paper would not be there. That is why it is very important to see that a sheet of paper is made of, only of, non-paper elements. Our body is like that also.

So is it possible to say that from nothing, something has come into existence? From nothing, can you have something? No. Because before we perceive it as a sheet of paper, it had been sunshine. It had been trees. It had been clouds. The paper hasn't come from nothing: *Rien ne se crée*. Nothing has been created. The day you believe to be the birthday of the sheet of paper is something we call a continuation day. Before that day, it had been something else, many things even, and on that day it was perceived as a sheet of paper. So the next time, when you celebrate your birthday, instead of singing happy birthday, you sing happy continuation day. We have done that to a number of friends. Happy continuation day.

The true nature of this sheet of paper, is the nature of no-birth: *Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd*. Our true nature is also the nature of no-birth. Our birth certificate is misleading. It was certified that we were born on that day from such and such hospital or city. We accepted to begin to be on that day, but we know very well that we had been there in the womb of our mother long before that. From nothing, how can you become something? From no one, how can you become someone? Even before the day of your conception in your mother, you had been there. In your father, in your mother, and everywhere else, also. So if you try to go back, you cannot find a beginning of you. You have been there for a long time and everywhere.

People think they can eliminate what they don't want: they can burn, they can kill. But it's not by destroying that they can reduce something to nothing. They killed Mahatma Gandhi. They shot Martin Luther King. But these people continue to be among us in many forms and their being continues. Their spirit continues.

Let us now try to eliminate this sheet of paper. Let us try to burn it to see whether we are capable of making it into nothing. Anyone has a match? I have the element water, but I don't have the element fire, so I am calling for the element fire. Please follow your breathing. Observe to see if it is possible to reduce something to nothing.

Ash is what you can see. If you have observed, you see that some smoke has come up and that is a continuation of the sheet of paper. Now the sheet of paper has become part of a cloud in the sky. You may meet it again tomorrow in the form of a raindrop on your forehead. But maybe you will not be mindful and you will not know that this is a meeting. You may think that the raindrop is foreign to you, but it may just be the sheet of paper into which you have practiced looking deeply. The way it is now, is it nothing? No, I don't think the sheet of paper has become nothing. Part of it has become the cloud. You can say, "Goodbye, see you again one day in one form or another."

It is very difficult to follow the path of a sheet of paper. It is as difficult as to find God. Some heat has penetrated into my body. I almost burned my fingers. It has penetrated into your body, also. It has gone very far. If you have fine equipment you could measure the impact of the heat even from a distant star. Because the impact of a small thing on the whole cosmos can be measured. It has produced some change in my organism, in your organism, and in the cosmos, also. The sheet of paper continues to be there, present. It is difficult for our conceptual eyes to see and discern but we know that it is always there and everywhere, also. And this little amount of ash may be returned to the earth later on. Maybe next year when you come back to Plum Village, you will see it in the form of a little flower or part of a plum leaf. We don't know. But we do know that nothing died. Nothing has become nothingness. So the true nature of the sheet of paper is no-death.

Looking deeply into our self, our body, our feelings, our perceptions. Looking into the mountains, the rivers, to another person, we have to be able to see, to touch the nature of no-birth and no-self in them. This is one of the practices that are very important in the Buddhist tradition.

In the teaching, you may distinguish two dimensions of reality. The first dimension is called historical dimension and the second dimension is called ultimate dimension. We should be able to touch both dimensions if we have enough concentration and mindfulness. Mindfulness and concentration cultivated by our daily practice must be used to look deeply into the nature of what is there.

When we look into the ocean, we can see the waves, different kinds of waves. Some are very big; some are very small. It seems that each wave has its private existence, its birth and its death. A wave can have a lot of complexes. I am smaller than you. I am less important than you. You are more beautiful than me. My life is short. I will no longer be here in a few minutes, a few seconds, and things like that. Ideas like beginning, end, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful, being here, not being here, all these ideas are assaulting the wave all the time. It cannot live its life as a wave in a peaceful happy way. We are very much the same. We are assailed by so many ideas including the ideas of birth and death, the idea of being and non-being, and we are scared. We get scared. Because of that fear, true happiness is not possible. So deep looking helps us to remove the fear.

According to the teachings, everything that is there is of the nature of no-birth and no-death. When conditions are sufficient, they appear to you. You have a perception of it and you say "This is." When one of the conditions is not there and you cannot perceive it, you say "It is not there." That is non-being. You are caught by the idea of being and non-being. When you see it differently, when you see it for the first time in a form that you have not seen before, you think that it has been born. When you don't recognize it anymore, you cannot have the same kind of perception, you say that "It has died." That is why we have to learn to look deeply in order to touch the realm of no ideas, no perceptions.

In Buddhism, there is a word that upsets many people. That is *nirvana*. Nirvana means extinction. Touching nirvana is the purpose of our practice. But a good question may be asked: extinction of what? It is like the word emptiness. The word emptiness is also very scary because it can provoke the feeling of non-being. Annihilation. Nothingness. We have to learn what words like nirvana or emptiness really mean. One of the best ways is to ask questions. "Dear Buddha, what do you mean? Emptiness? Empty of what? What do we mean by extinction? Extinction of what?"

Extinction first means extinction of ideas, like ideas of birth and death, being and non-being. When you practice looking deeply into the nature of a wave, you have a chance to find out that a wave is made of water. While this is a wave, it is at the same time water. It is possible for a wave to live its life as a wave, and to live its life as the life of water at the same time. This is important. As a wave, she thinks that she has a beginning and an end, high, low, being, and non-being. She thinks that before this, non-being, and after this, non-being. And this is her life span and she is a separate entity. If we look deeply, we see that this wave is made of all the other waves. If we study deeply, we see that the movements of all other waves have combined to make this wave possible. In this wave, you can touch all the other waves. It's like when you touch the sheet of paper, you touch all the other non-paper elements in it. So what the wave would call itself is really made of non-self elements. So the idea of a self is an idea to be removed in order for you to touch reality. The self is made of non-self elements. The moment when you realize that, you lose all your fear.

This body is not me. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. So if you identify yourself with this life span, if you identify yourself with that hate, and if you imagine that you are separated from everything, you are not this, you are wrong, because you are everything at the same time. The wave while living the life of a wave may like to bend down and touch her true nature, the nature of water. All these ideas, beginning, end, high, low, this, that, more or less beautiful, all these ideas can be applied somehow to the wave, but they cannot be applied to water. So wave and all these ideas can be described as the historical dimension and water can be described as the ultimate dimension. And you have your ultimate dimension. Your

ultimate dimension is the dimension of no-birth and no-death. Because we cannot talk about water in terms of beginning, end, high, low, like the way you talk about a wave.

Sunyata, emptiness, is a very important term in Buddhism. Very misleading, also. If you look deeply into this sheet of paper, you see that it is full. It is full of everything in the cosmos: the sunshine, the trees, the clouds, the earth, the minerals, everything. Except for one thing. It is empty of one thing only—a separate self. The sheet of paper cannot be by itself alone. It has to interbe with everything else in the cosmos. That is why the word interbe can be more helpful than the word to be. To be means to interbe. The sheet of paper cannot be without sunshine, cannot be without the forest. The sheet of paper has to interbe with the sunshine, to interbe with the forest. To be together—that is the real meaning of interdependent coproduction.

If you ask how the world comes into existence, into being, the Buddha would say in very simple terms: "This is because that is. This is not because that is not." Because the sunshine is, the sheet of paper is. Because the tree is, the sheet of paper is. You cannot be by yourself, alone. You have to interbe with everything else in the cosmos. That is the nature of interbeing. I don't think that this word is in the dictionary, but I believe that it will be there soon, because it is helpful to see the real nature of things, the nature of interbeing

Emptiness means the absence of a separate self. If you are locked into the idea of a separate self, you have great fear. But if you look and you are capable of seeing "you" everywhere, you lose that fear. I have practiced as a monk. I have practiced looking deeply every day. I don't just give Dharma talks. I can see me in my students. I can see me in my ancestors. I can see my continuation everywhere in this moment. I have not been able to go back to my country in the past thirty years. I went out in order to call for peace, to stop the killing, and I was not allowed to go home by many succeeding governments. Yet, I feel that I am there, very real. Many new students of monks and nuns have come up. I have not seen them directly, but they have learned from me through books, tapes, and other disciples who have gone to Vietnam. I don't have that kind of painful feeling of a person being in exile because many friends of mine go to Vietnam and they feel my presence there even stronger than in other countries, including France. I see myself in my students. Every effort I make every day is to transmit the best that I have received from my teachers, from my practice, to my students. That is done with love.

I don't think that I will cease to be someday. I told my friends that the twenty-first century is a hill, a beautiful hill, and we shall be climbing together as a sangha and I will be with them all the way, true. So for me that is not a problem because I have seen everyone in me, me in everyone. That is the practice of looking deeply, the practice of emptiness, the practice of interbeing.

Anathapindika was learning and practicing these teachings in the last moments of his life. Suddenly, Ananda saw Anathapindika cry. He felt sorry for the lay person. He said, "Dear friend why are you crying? Did you regret anything? Do you regret anything? Did you fail in your practice?" Anathapindika said, "No, Lord Ananda, I don't regret anything. I am so happy and I practice so well. It is wonderful to practice with your presence here supporting me. Well, I practice very well." "Why do you cry then?" "I cry because I am so moved. I have been a supporter of the Buddha and the Sangha for more than thirty years, but I have never learned and practiced a teaching that is wonderful like this." He was so happy the last moment of his life. He suddenly got the greatest gift he ever got—no fear. Ananda said "Dear friend, you don't know, but this kind of teaching, we monks and nuns receive almost every day."

Anathapindika said, "Lord Ananda, I have a request. My last request. Please go home and tell Lord Buddha that although many of us are too busy in our lay life, there are those of us who are capable of receiving and have the time to practice this wonderful teaching. Please tell the Lord to dispense this teaching to us, also, the lay people." Ananda agreed to do so. And that was the last statement made by the lay person, Anathapindika.

The story you can read in *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I wish that you have the time to take care of this very important practice, the practice of non-fear, the practice of looking deeply to relieve in yourself the deep fear that is always there. If you have non-fear in you, your life will be more beautiful, happier, and you can help many people. Non-fear has an energy as a base for social action, for actions of compassion, to protect people, to protect the earth, to satisfy your needs to love and to serve. Non-fear is very important.

Omega Institute is a place where we shall be leading a retreat for one thousand people this Fall. I had been there several times. Omega is a place in the northern part of New York state. One day I was going there for a retreat with Sister Chan Khong and a number of friends. We learned that our friend, Alfred Hassler, was dying in a hospital on the way. So we decided to stop and to visit Alfred. He had been a very strong supporter for peace in Vietnam—for ending the war in Vietnam. I came out of Vietnam to call for peace and I made a lot of friends in Europe and in America while working to end the war in Vietnam. Alfred Hassler was one of the friends who strongly supported that effort. He was then director of a peace organization called Fellowship of Reconciliation.

When we arrived in the hospital, he was being fed with serum glucose and he was in a coma. His daughter, Laura, was there. Laura had helped us in the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris contacting other peace delegations in the Paris peace talks. And Dorothy, his wife, was there. When they saw us, they were so happy. They did not dream that we could make our way to the place where Alfred was dying.

Laura tried to wake Alfred up, but she could not. Alfred was in a deep coma. I think that the hospital was trying their best to help him. He was in a very difficult state. I decided to ask Sister Chan Khong to sing to Alfred a song I wrote using words from a sutra: "This body is not me. I am not caught by this body. I am life without boundaries. I have never been born. I will never die. Look at me. Look at the stars and the moon. All of them are me, are manifestations of me. So smile to me, take my hand, say goodbye that we will see each other right away after this. We will see each other in every walk of life. We will recognize each other again and again, everywhere." Sister Chan Khong began to sing this song.

After she finished singing for the second time, Alfred came back. He woke up. It was like a miracle. Please don't think that if someone is in a coma, he is not there or she is not there. She is there in a certain way. If you are to accompany a dying person, you have to be there also—to be there body and mind united in mindfulness, solid without fear. And you have to talk to him, to sing to him or to her, because there is a way that person can hear you. This is very true in many circumstances. Don't just sit there. Talk to him. Talk to her. Sing to him. Tell stories. This is my experience. Many people come back, wake up because of that.

Laura was so happy. She said "Alfred." She called her father. "Alfred," she said, "Do you know that Thay is here? Do you know that Sister Chan Khong is here?" Alfred could not talk, but his eyes proved that he was aware that we were there. Sister Chan Khong began to talk to him, recalling the experiences that we had had working together to stop the war in Vietnam. "Alfred, do you remember that day you were visiting the monk, Tri Quang in Anh Quan?"

Temple? The United States had just given the order to bomb Hanoi and Thay Tri Quang refused to see any westerners, pacifist or not. He didn't want to see you and you sit outside and you slip in a sheet of paper and you said, 'I will not live until you see me. I will go on a fast?. I am a pacifist. I have come for you, for the people of Vietnam, and not to support the bombing in Hanoi.' And fifteen minutes later, the Venerable opened the door and with a broad smile invited you. Do you remember that, Alfred? "

"Alfred, do you remember the time we organized a peace demonstration in Rome? There were three hundred Catholic priests wearing the names of three hundred Buddhist monks in the jail of Vietnam because these monks refused to be drafted into the army. Remember these things?" In fact, she was doing exactly the things that Shariputra was doing to Anathapindika. Watering the seeds of happiness, because Alfred got a lot of happiness working for peace. When you are able to do something for the cause of your life, you are happy.

During that time, I was doing massage to Alfred's feet. Because when you die, you may get a little bit numb and you don't have the feeling that your body is there. So it is very helpful to massage him or her. "Alfred do you know that Thay is massaging your feet?" And Alfred, although he could not say anything, his eyes proved that he was aware. We continued like that for five, seven minutes. And suddenly, suddenly, Alfred opened his mouth and pronounced a word. "Wonderful. Wonderful." Two times. And after that he sank back into a coma. We waited for a half hour or more and we have to go to the retreat in Omega.

Before leaving, I told Dorothy, his wife, and Laura, his daughter, to continue the practice—talking to him, singing to him, evoking the good memories. I had to give an orientation talk that night. Early in the morning, I got the news that Alfred passed away just a few hours after we left, peacefully, without pain. It's wonderful to have friends who understand you and support you in this difficult moment. It's wonderful to be able to be there for your friend in this very difficult moment, but you have to cultivate so that you'll be solid, you'll be without fear. Because that is the best way that you can help the other person.

This teaching of the Buddha about non-fear, about no-birth and no-death is the cream of the whole body of the teaching. You have come to Plum Village in order to learn techniques to get more solidity, to transform some of your sufferings. Yes, that is good, but don't miss the opportunity. This is a kind of invitation for you to go deeper, to learn, and to practice so that you become someone who has a great capacity for being solid, calm, without fear, because our society needs people like you who have these qualities. And your children, our children, need people like this in order to go on.

It's forty-four minutes after noon. So we shall have a walking meditation after this. After fifteen minutes of break, we will have a formal lunch a little bit late today. Everyone is invited to the formal lunch. This is to show you how they practice in Buddhist monasteries during retreat. We make the ritual very short—reduce it to the minimum—for you to have a taste. It may be a great joy to participate in such a meal. You see the monks and nuns in their orange robes, holding their bowls. Please participate in all the lunch. We will eat in such a way that peace, joy, and stability will be possible during the time of eating. It is a real practice. From the time you hold the bowl and look into the bowl, you begin already to practice. When you fill the bowl with the food, you also practice mindful breathing. There are many gatas, short poems, for you to breathe along with so that you dwell in mindfulness. You just look at the brothers and sisters, the monastic people and the Tiep Hien people in order to see how they do it. Because the practice is to be mindful in every moment. When you have gotten your food, you practice walking meditation to this hall and you sit down. You place the

bowl or the plate in front of you and you begin to practice sitting meditation. Not waiting. Waiting is not a practice.

Enjoy your sitting. Enjoy your breathing. Enjoy the collective energy of the sangha. The monks and the nuns have wooden spoons so that they can eat very, very quietly without producing any noise. Unfortunately we don't have wooden spoons for everyone, so do your best not to produce noise and you will feel the atmosphere of the monastery. Every movement of your spoon, of your fork, should be mindful. You chew your food slowly and you become aware of what you are eating. During the meal, become aware of the food. Each morsel of food is an ambassador coming from the whole cosmos just like the sheet of paper. Chew thirty times and be aware of what you are chewing. Don't chew your sorrow, your projects, your worries—just enjoy the food and pay attention also to the community of brothers and sisters around you. Just two objects of your mindfulness: the food and the community of practice.

There will be some chanting—not too much. The monks and nuns, they have their traditional bowls. They will hold the bowl with this mudra. Two fingers to support the bowl and three fingers to keep it from falling. Like this. And with the other hand, they practice the mudra of peace. They hold the bowl like this and they chant and offer the food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos, all the *bodhisattvas* in the present moment who are everywhere in the world trying to relieve suffering. During that time, their spoon is stuck into the food with the concave face outward.

Then after the chanting, I think about two minutes or less, there will be an offering to share the food with other living beings. This is a symbol. A small quantity of food will be put in a small bowl like this with water. Then everyone will do the concentration in order to touch all living beings who need the food to survive. We pour our compassion, our understanding, into the food. Then one novice will go to a window and chant a gata of four lines inviting all living beings to come and receive the food. That is to nourish the compassion in us. The tradition began at the time of the Buddha. Every time they ate, they always put aside a little bit of their food to share with the animals and the insects around them.

Then we will practice the five contemplations. We enjoy our meal silently and mindfully and you will feel the spirit of fellowship, sisterhood, while of eating. So please join us, especially those of you who have not had this experience. This will be very rewarding.

Healing is Possible through Resting

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 30, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment." I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.
Deep, slow.
Calm, ease.
Smile, release.
Present moment,
Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you'll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, "in" and "out." It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It's easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don't mix the two things up. Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-breath 100 percent. "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in." You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don't think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself—mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, “in, out” means, “breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” It’s very simple, but it’s wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice “in, out” for three times, I am sure that you’ll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of “in, out.” Today, try and you’ll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced “In, out” three, four, or five times, you’ll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice “deep and slow.”

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you’ll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you’ll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, “Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful.” If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It’s wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. “In, out.” The practice is smooth. “In, out.” Once more. “In, out.” You’ll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced “In, out” already.

Now, I’d like to practice, “Deep, slow.” So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. “Deep, slow.” It has become deeper by itself, you don’t have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times “In, out.” That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together “Deep, slow” three times. “Deep, slow” [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with “Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, “Calm, ease.” It means, “Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease.” This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don’t feel peaceful in yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice “Calm, ease.”

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. “Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go.” I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand and invite her to practice. “Calm, ease.” “Let us, together, practice calming and easing. ‘Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go’” at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with “Calm, ease” or you might begin in a classical way with “In, out” first and then “Deep, slow” and then “Calm, ease.” Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times ‘Calm, ease’ but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you’ll feel much better. “Calm, ease.”

Then you’ll come to the fourth pebble, and that is “Smile, release. Smile, release.” “Breathing in, I smile.” You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you’ll feel a lot better. You may protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That’s not natural.” Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural.”

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don’t feel joy and you’ll see after you smile that you’ll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don’t suffer that much any more. So don’t discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It’s totally dark. Breath in and smile, and you’ll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy—the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don’t say, “I have no joy, why do I have to smile?” Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that’s very natural. When you don’t have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don’t see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It’s wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we'll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you'll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I'd like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is "Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment."

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don't have to go to the future. We don't have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don't need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don't need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say "Present moment." It means, "I establish myself in the present moment. I don't run any more." This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It's wonderful like that, I don't need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It's wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. "Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment."

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life

is most precious. You've got to meet her, you've got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don't miss your appointment with life. Don't miss the present moment. That is why the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. "Present moment, wonderful moment."

Now I would like to ask you to sing and I will practice. I practice for you. I will practice breathing in and out and I enjoy for you. Okay.

[The community sings: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment."]

I think by now, everyone knows the gatha by heart. I would like to tell you that this gatha is also good for practicing walking meditation. We shall do walking meditation after the talk and you may like to walk peacefully and happily with this poem. You breathe in and you make two steps. You say, 'In, in.' Then you breath out and you make another two steps, "Out, out." That is walking meditation. You don't do anything else. Your mind and your body are totally for the breathing in, the breathing out, and the making of steps. You are perfectly concentrated in walking and breathing, you are not concerned with other things. And you can continue with "In, out" like that for a few minutes. If you want to walk a little bit quicker, you can make three steps while breathing in and breathing out.

You do it very naturally, in such a way that you get a lot of pleasure. Don't be so serious, so solemn. You do it very, very, very naturally. "In, in, out, out." If you enjoy walking, you feel wonderful. You are doing the practice correctly. After some time, you switch into 'Deep, slow.' "Deep, deep, slow, slow. Deep, deep, slow, slow." Very concentrated. And we shall be walking with you. Everyone is concentrated. Everyone is peaceful. Everyone is joyful. The energy of joy and of peace will radiate from each person, and if we walk in the sangha like that, we will receive the collective energy and it will be very, very strong.

There is still one pebble left. But for this gatha we don't need all six pebbles, we need only five. After you have practiced five gathas, your sitting meditation is done. So you hear the sound of the bell, you collect your pebble, and you put it in your small bag.

Do you think my small bag is beautiful? I like this color very much. If you want to have your bag in yellow or orange, you are welcome. Make a very beautiful pebble bag for your meditation because you are going to practice using it here. And when you go home you'll continue to use your pebble meditation bag. If the adults want to imitate, they are welcome. It's wonderful. There are those of us who have rosaries—108—and the use of the rosary is exactly like the use of the pebbles. But I think this way is fun.

So, please, young people, I think today you have a lot of things to do. Do them joyfully. I hope the children who have been here for one or two weeks will transmit the teaching of the pebble meditation to the newer children and then we will practice together. Now, when you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and continue the practice.

[Bell]

I would like to give a little bit more instruction about [conscious breathing]. Don't try to breathe in. Don't make any effort of breathing in. It is very important. Allow yourself to breathe in naturally. You breathe in any way, why do you have to make a determination to breathe in? That is the point. Allow yourself to breathe in normally. Only pay attention to your in-breath. Don't say, "My in-breath, come here, I will tell you how to do it." No. You allow yourself to breathe in, that's all. Short or long, you allow it to be the way it is. Be completely non-violent while holding your baby. Don't force your baby to be like this or to be like that, allow it to be as it is. Embrace it only with your mindfulness. It is very important.

When you love someone, you allow him to be or allow her to be. Don't say, "If you don't do this, I will not love you." This is already the practice of love. Allow your in-breath to be itself. Just embrace it with the energy of mindfulness. "Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in." That's all. The impact will be great.

Many people practice like they are in a hard labor camp. You force yourself, you make too much effort, and you tire yourself out after some time. If you know how to allow yourself to rest, to allow your in-breath and your out-breath to flow in and out naturally, you will never get tired. You only need to light up your mindfulness and to be aware of it. Like when you turn on the light, you just turn on the light. And because of the light you are aware that the bell is there, your friend is there. Awareness is like that. So you recognize your in-breath as an in-breath, your out-breath as your out-breath, and you embrace them with love.

Then in no time at all, their quality of being will be improved. Like a suffering baby who is kicking, is crying, is vibrating. You don't say, "Now, stop, don't cry, don't be agitated!" You don't say this. You don't do anything; you don't intervene. You don't force it to be the way you want. Just pick up the baby and embrace it with all your being. When you have the energy of tenderness, of love and of care, that energy will naturally penetrate into the baby and there will be a transformation. Many of you have been a mother or a father and you know this. Just hold the baby with your tenderness, with your whole presence. And that whole presence, body and mind concentrated we call mindfulness (and you are capable of being mindful, you know). So you cultivate your mindfulness so that you will be mindful more, to be there for your suffering, for yourself, for your beloved one.

In sitting meditation you do like that also. Don't struggle in order to sit. Allow yourself to sit in a relaxed way. "Smile, release." Remember, there was a time when you'd sit in your living room watching television? You could sit for one hour, even two hours? And you didn't complain that you had pain in your shoulders or arms. You just allow yourself to sit. Sitting meditation is not a struggle. If you take it to be a struggle, you'll be tired. After fifteen minutes you'll feel pain in your shoulders and in your head. So, allow yourself to rest. When you practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, allow yourself to rest. It is possible to rest while practicing walking meditation, sitting meditation, mindful breathing. In fact, this practice I offer to you as a means of resting.

Many of us take vacations. But during the time of the vacation we don't know how to rest. Then after the vacation, we are more tired. So, we now allow ourselves to rest our body and our spirit. Here, we are learning the art of resting. Meditation as the practice of resting.

Our body has the capacity of healing itself. You know that. When you get a cut in your finger, do you have to do anything? No. You only have to keep it clean and in a few days it will be healed. Your body has a number of problems within because you have not allowed it to rest.

If you know the art of total relaxation, the art of allowing your body to rest, most of these troubles will go away after a few weeks.

When an animal is wounded in the woods, it knows how to do this. It seeks a peaceful corner in the forest and it lays down for several days. Several generations of ancestors have transmitted to them the wisdom that this is the only way to restore themselves. They don't have doctors, they don't have pharmacists, but they know how to rest. They don't need to run after their prey, they don't need to eat—in fact, they fast during these three, four, five days of resting. And one day the animal is healed and it stands up and it goes to look for a source of food.

We don't know how to do like animals. In order to get well quickly we bring a lot of interventions into our body: we take a lot of drugs, we undergo a lot of treatments. But we don't know how to allow our body to rest. So learning how to allow your body to rest is a very important practice. Love your body. You learn total relaxation and you can do it several times a day. Five minutes is enough, ten minutes. Even three minutes are already very good if you know how to allow your body to rest completely.

And for your spirit, it is the same. Our consciousness is able to heal itself. It has the power of self healing but you don't allow it to rest. You continue to feed your consciousness with your anger, your worries, your thinking, and so on. You don't believe in your consciousness. You are seeking for a means to heal it but you don't know how to allow yourself to rest. You keep thinking the whole day and you keep worrying the whole day. You never allow yourself to rest. If you know how to practice total relaxation, you'll know how to smile and how to send your smile to different parts of your body. During that time, you have stopped thinking and worrying because you are focused on your body, your breathing, your walking. When you practice mindful breathing, when you practice “In, out, deep, slow,” not only can you nourish yourself—body and spirit—but you can also stop your thinking. Stopping the thinking, stopping the worries, is very important.

Our mind is like a cassette tape turning nonstop day and night. We have a habit. You are not there, because you are carried away by your thinking, by your worries. You may get lost in the past, regretting the past or being caught in the suffering that you endured during the past. You suffered in the past already but now you want to suffer more by recalling the past. You call your past back in order for you to suffer more. Why do you have to show it several times, your suffering? Cows, when they eat grass, they swallow and then they bring it up again and swallow for a second time. Many of us do the same. We have suffered already in the past. But we want to bring our suffering back to the present moment and suffer more. We like that.

The future is not yet there but we think of it and we worry, and we become scared. We are not capable of dwelling in the present moment where life is. Life and its many wonders are available inside of you and around you and yet you are not able to touch its wonders because you get lost in the past, in the future, and also in your projects, your worries. How can your mind rest and restore itself? Our mind also has the capacity of self healing just as our body.

Remember when you lost someone very dear, you suffered, and you thought that you'd never restore yourself, you'd never be able to forget that suffering. You thought that the suffering would dwell with you, the wound would be with you, forever. But some time later you got used to it and you were able to go on with life. This means that your mind, your spirit, was able to heal itself.

We have to trust our spirit in the way we trust our body. Our spirit has the power of self healing if only we know how to allow it to rest and don't continue to feed it with more worries, with more projects, with more fear. The practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, enjoying the contemplation of the sky, of the vegetation, of being with friends, enjoying things in the present moment, helps you to stop these kinds of feelings—the heart and the spirit filling with worries and fear. You will heal in the inside.

During the time you are here in Plum Village, you are surrounded by many friends who are practicing resting, recuperating themselves. Do a lot of total relaxation, mindful relaxing, walking, and sitting meditation, and enjoying doing things mindfully to help the sangha.

[Bell]

Many of us have had the good fortune of having a loving father, a loving mother, a loving teacher, or a loving brother or sister or friend. We have to call on them for help. Whether they are still alive or they have passed away, they are always there in you.

A father always wants to love his child. That is the deepest nature of a father. If you see that your father does not love you, it is because he was not able to manifest his love, that's all. No one had helped him to express his love. All fathers, deep inside, want to love their child. But if they say, "I hate you! I don't recognize you as my child!" that is because they do not know how to do it. It does not mean that a father does not love his child. You also, you love your children even if your children do things you consider to be negative, that irritate you. Still, deep inside you, the love you have for your children is still intact. You only need to learn how to express your love. There are many people who think that their father or their mother doesn't love them, many are victims of such a vision. But, according to my experience, all fathers love their children, deeply. All mothers, also. Even animals, they love their children.

When you look into your hand—if you look deeply—you'll see that this hand of yours is also the hand of your mother and your father. Because you are a continuation of him, you are a continuation of her. This hand has been transmitted to you by your mother, by your father. It is also the hand of your ancestors. So, don't think that this is only your hand. This is the hand of several generations. And you are going to transmit this to your children and their children.

All your wisdom, all the wisdom, all the experience, all the suffering, all the happiness of all the generations of your ancestors are here in your hand. Our ancestors, their wisdom, their happiness, their sorrow, their hope, their fear are there inside you. They all have been transmitted to you. In every cell of your body you find everything: all the hope, all the fear, all the happiness, all the suffering of all the ancestors are in each cell of you. Now mankind is capable of cloning itself. We need only to take one cell, any cell of our body, and we can duplicate ourselves.

This means that in each cell there is the presence of you as a whole. The one is the all, that is the teaching of the Buddha in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. And in each cell of our body there is hell, there is the Pure Land. There is the Buddha, there is Mara, there is Jesus, there is Satan, there is happiness, there is sorrow, in just one cell. All our ancestors can be touched, can be found in one cell, because one cell contains everything. And this is not just an abstract idea. You have heard of the technique of cloning. We know that one cell can manifest as the whole thing. So look in your own hand, and you'll see that the cells in your hand are also the cells of your father, your mother, your ancestors. Many of them were wise, were happy. Call on these elements within yourself to come and help you and rescue you.

You have blood ancestors and you also have spiritual ancestors in yourself. If I only have blood ancestors, I cannot be myself, as I am now. Now I use my eyes in such a way that my ancestors did not. I have learned the Buddha's way of looking. I look at things with mindfulness. I look at things and touch the nature of interbeing in them. The way I look at the sky, at a pebble, as a person, is very deep. And without the Buddha, my teacher, I could not look like that. The way I breathe, the way I walk, also. My feet, walking, are also the feet of the Buddha. I am walking with the Buddha's feet. Not only do I walk with my mothers feet and my fathers feet, but also I walk with the feet of the Buddha, because each step I can generate joy and peace.

You have your beloved father in you. You have your beloved mother in you. You have your beloved teacher in you. Your teacher may be Jesus, your teacher may be Buddha, and, according to your practice, your teacher is more or less evident, powerful, in you.

Suppose you have a painful spot on your body. Why don't you call on your father, your mother, your ancestors, to come and help? Touch that painful spot with the energy of healing, of love. Because you know that deeply in him, your father loves you, deeply in her, your mother loves you, deeply in him, your teacher loves you and wants you well.

Suppose you have a tumor that might become important and the doctors say that the only way is to open you up and take it and throw it out. That is our tendency. If there is something that we don't want, we tend to cut it out and to throw it away: surgery. We have created the painful things in our body and we don't want them any more, we want to throw them out. It is the same with your mind, your consciousness. There are tumors in your consciousness, the tumor of hate, of despair, of depression. And we also want to cut and throw it out.

That is a way of life, a habit of thinking that we have learned from this new society. If you don't want anything, you eliminate it either by using a gun or a knife. We have to look deeply into our civilization and to see in what direction we are going. When we have something painful in us, we don't know how to take good care of it. We don't know how to embrace it the way we embrace our child. We want to take it, to throw it out. We want to punish it.

So, breathe in deeply, and see that this hand is the hand of your father, your loving father, or your loving mother or your loving teacher. Even if she is no longer alive, she still is real in you because every cell in you is also her. Every cell in you is also him. Call on them to help. There are healthy cells in you, and the healthy cells will come to rescue the cells that are not so healthy. Because you do not know how to take care of them, some of them are tired and are being transformed into a problem.

So breathe in and bring your father, your mother, and your loving teacher back into your hand. You call the name of your father, the name of your teacher and suddenly your hand becomes the hand of your mother, your teacher. And then, when you breath out, touch the painful spot. Breathe slowly. Transmit all these energies to the painful spot. And after you finish, do it again. Breathe in, call his name, and you make him alive, you make her alive. The energy of your father or your teacher will be present in your hand. And when you breathe out you smile, and the energy of your father or your teacher will penetrate into you. Practice like this every day, whether in a sitting position or in a laying down position.

In the moment of your practice you are totally relaxed. You have faith in the people who love you, who want to wish you well. Then you make them present in the form of energy and you

use that energy to touch and heal. Your hand has a healing power. You don't need someone else. Every one of us has a healing power within himself or herself, an energy you can generate into the palm of your hand. That energy is stored within each cell of your body. Learn to do it with your body. If you have a liver that does not work so well, that is suffering, concentrate yourself, inviting your father, your mother.

I have no doubt that my father always loved me. And I don't consider my father as nonexistent, because my father is in every cell in me. When I call on him, he is back in every cell in my body. When I generate that energy called the energy of a loving father, I touch myself and say, "Father, please help" And your father will be transmitting to you this energy. During that time you feel peaceful, knowing you are being loved, being taken care of by your father.

Remember when you were a small child, you had a fever and your tongue was so bitter you didn't want to eat anything? And your front felt like it was burning and when your mother came, she put her hand on your forehead, and suddenly you felt like you were in paradise. Just one hand. You felt much better with the presence of your mother and just one hand. Don't think that hand is no longer there. It is still there because your hand is the continuation of your mother's hand. And if you call on her, "Mommy? Please help," when you breath in and then, when you put your hand on your forehead and you breath out, you will receive exactly the same energy. Nothing is lost.

Take care of your body in such a way. Allow your body to rest in whatever position you are. And later you will be able to take care of your spirit, your ailing spirit, in the same way. You have blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of despair within yourself. You have to embrace these blocks of pain and sorrow exactly in the same way. Call on them to help.

The Buddha-to-be is not something abstract. The Buddha is very deep in me because I have learned the practice. I have learned to look in the way the Buddha looked. I have learned to breathe the way the Buddha breathed. I have learned to walk in the way the Buddha walked. On the Gridhrakuta Mountain where the Buddha stayed more than twenty years, I sat there and I contemplated the very sunset that he had contemplated. I was looking with my eyes and his eyes at the beautiful sunset.

You also are capable of looking with your Buddha eyes. In your daily life you are used to looking with your eyes, the eyes that do not have the energy of mindfulness and concentration behind them. But with your mindful breathing, you can generate the Buddha eyes in you. When you use these eyes to look, you will see things much differently. It is like having a pair of binoculars and if you bring them up to your eyes, you can see differently. So, you have the Buddha eyes transmitted to you by your teacher. Why don't you use them? Just breathing in, breathing out, generates the energy of mindfulness and suddenly, you have the Buddha eyes. Looking with the Buddha eyes, you will not get angry. You will despair.

You should not have any complex. The Buddha is enough, Jesus is enough. Jesus said so, "I am in the father, the father is in me, I am in you, and you are in me." Very clear. You can't deny that teaching in the heart of Christianity.

So, if the Buddha is in you, why don't you call on him for help? You just breathe in and breathe out and Buddha will be alive, you can use Buddha eyes, Buddha hands. "Dear Buddha, please help," and suddenly you have the hand of the Buddha available to you. How simple. What else do you practice? What else do you learn? This is very simple, easy to

understand, and yet very deep. The healing that you want, you can provide by yourself. You are supported by the sangha, by the Dharma, by the Buddha, every moment of your daily life. If only you know this, you will realize that support is always available and then you will not feel alone and scared.

So today, in the Dharma discussion, please discuss this practice. Allow us to rest. Allow our body to rest. There are techniques of resting. You may not be used to them but they are good habits to learn. We have learned the other kind of habit of not resting, and now we have to learn a positive habit to be able to rest—bodily and mentally. And we have to share with each other the ways we do this to arrive at a relaxed state of the body and of the mind.

Walking is a way of resting, sitting is a way of resting, eating is a way of resting. Don't struggle. We have struggled all our lives, we have gone nowhere at all. Stop the struggle and take care of our body, our mind. Practice resting and restoring ourselves and we'll go very far.

We will get together and discuss this. We will share our experience of the practice of resting. There are brothers and sisters who have been in the practice longer, they can share their practice. You may ask questions. And we practice the first day, the second day, and then we'll meet again and share again our practice. If you have any difficulties, if you have any questions, or if you have some success, some joy in your practice, please share these with other people.

We practice as a sangha. There are dharma teachers available in our midst, there are also brothers and sisters who are familiar with the teaching and the practice. So do profit from their presence.

And when you feel concentrated and mindful, and you enjoy your practice of walking, of breathing, of smiling, then you'll contribute a lot to the sangha. Because if we see you relaxed, walking mindfully, smiling, breathing mindfully, we will be reminded to do the same. Together, we'll produce that collective energy that will nourish us. When we go home, we can continue the practice even with our children. Because the children in Plum Village proved that they are capable of the practice.

Recognizing Feelings

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on November 25, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 25th of November 1999 and we are in the Lower Hamlet, we know that we have thirty seven days to live before the arrival of the year 2000. I like to visualize the 21st century as a beautiful hill. It would be wonderful to climb the hill together. To climb, is not to arrive, but just for the pleasure of climbing.

Suppose here is the year 2000 and here is 2100 and this must be 2050 and we have 37 days before the arrival at this point. To climb a hill together does not mean that we want to arrive as soon as possible at the year 2050, but just to enjoy the climbing, especially if we climb with the Sangha, people who know how to appreciate what is happening in the present moment because there are many wonders of life that are available in the here and the now and climbing is not to arrive, just to climb, just to enjoy climbing.

The practice of Buddhism is the practice of living deeply every moment of your daily life and the heart of the practice is mindfulness, because mindfulness is the capacity to be there, fully present in the here and the now. And when we have the energy of mindfulness we are capable of being there in the here and the now because that is a basic condition for touching deeply life. If you are distracted, if your mind is caught by your regret concerning the past, or the fear and uncertainty about the future, then you are not capable of being there fully alive in the here and the now. Therefore, you miss all the wonders of life that are available in that moment. That is why mindfulness is at the heart of Buddhist practice, you have to be mindful of every moment of your daily life.

When you drink your morning tea you should drink your tea in such a way that life should be possible in that moment. Peace, stability and joy be possible in that moment of tea drinking. You have to be concentrated, you have to be mindful of the tea in order for your tea drinking to be a real act of mindfulness. Only by drinking your tea in mindfulness that you can enjoy really the tea, you have to be totally present in that moment of drinking tea. You have to help the tea to reveal itself one hundred percent to you. You have to offer yourself one hundred percent for the tea and then you and the tea will become perfect in that moment. And the tea drinking can bring you a lot of happiness. That is simple, that is something you can do and that is the practice.

When you sit with your son or your daughter, sit in such a way that you be there one hundred percent of yourself, for him, for her. You will see that your son or your daughter will reveal himself or herself to you one hundred percent. You are available to him to her and she will be available to you one hundred percent. So, sit with your daughter in such a way that you are totally present and alive so that the moment of sitting together becomes an eternal moment. A moment of joy, of peace. If you are caught by your worries, by your regret, your fear, your anger you are not there and your daughter, your son is not there either.

When you look at the morning sky you look at the sky in such a way that the sky will reveal to you one hundred percent of itself, and the basic condition is that you be there one hundred percent for the sky. I remember one day I received the visit of a reporter from San Francisco. He was there to interview me and I invited him to have tea with me in the garden. I proposed that he forget the interview, that he just enjoy the tea with me and I gave him instructions as to how to enjoy the tea, to be there fully for the tea and he liked it.

He had a taste of mindfulness practice, that is why the article he wrote is good. Because what is the use of interviewing if you don't know the practice? And then I walked with him to his car. Halfway I asked him to stop and I proposed to him to look up at the blue sky and, breathing in I am aware of the blue sky, breathing out I smile to the blue sky. And we stood there looking at the sky, breathing in and out together and smiling. And he told me, it is

wonderful, it is the first time I look at the sky that way, very deep. The sky revealed itself to him entirely because he was there one hundred percent for the sky. Many of us have looked at the sky, have seen the sky of course, but not in that way. If our mindfulness is clear then the sky will reveal itself to us in such a deep way. So, drink your tea, sit with your son or daughter, look at the sky in such a way that life be possible in that moment. That is life.

The word Buddhism comes from the root Budh. Budh means to wake up, to be awake, to know what is going on. Budh means to know also, to know what is going on and the one who is awake, the one who is mindful knowing what is going on, that one we call him/her a Buddha. Buddha is not the name of a person, Buddha is just a word that describes someone who is really present, awake, knowing what is happening and that is why the energy that inhabits the Buddha is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity of being truly present in the moment. And when we drink our tea perfectly in mindfulness we are a Buddha but because we don't practice we are not a full time Buddha. We are a Buddha for a few seconds and then we are non-Buddha again. That is why with the support of a community we can be more and more a Buddha.

Practicing mindfulness you will develop the capacity of being free, we cultivate our freedom and we know that freedom is the foundation of our happiness. There is no happiness without freedom. When we walk we can walk as a free person or as a slave, it depends on your way of walking. If you are caught by your anger, by your worry about the future, by your guilt concerning the past then you are not a free person, you walk but you are a slave. But if you are capable of making steps that are solid, peaceful, and if you enjoy every step that you make you are free from your worries, your fear, your regret and then you are a free person. And being a free person you can be very happy. So the amount of happiness you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart. So, the practice of mindfulness, being there in the here and the now is really the practice of freedom. Not to allow yourself to be caught by the past, by the future, by your worries, by your anxieties. Free yourself in order to be there in the here and the now, to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now, that is the practice of mindfulness.

During walking meditation, whether we walk alone or walk with a group of people we should learn how to walk as a free person. And as a free person you can enjoy every step you make. The earth that you tread becomes the Kingdom of God, becomes the Buddha Land. Whether it is hell or the Kingdom of God depends on us on our way of walking. If we are full of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of violence, the very ground that we walk, that we tread becomes hell. But if we are a free person, if we have the energy of love, compassion, understanding and freedom in our heart and then the place will become the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. Everything depends on us, everything depends on our freedom and that is why practicing Buddhist meditation means to contemplate your freedom.

When you clean the floor, when you clean the bathroom or the kitchen you can do that as a slave or as a free person. As a slave you suffer but the other person while scrubbing the floor, cleaning the bathroom is very happy because she is a free person, it depends on your way. And mindfulness helps you to free yourself, and you can clean the bathroom with a lot of love and understanding, with a smile and that is an expression of your love and doing the work of cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen you get a lot of happiness. But if you are accompanied by your anger, discrimination and despair, cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen may become hard labor and we suffer a lot, every minute of doing it. That is why the practice of mindfulness can be described as the practice of freedom. Cultivating freedom. Where is the freedom? Is the freedom possible? Is there any freedom at all? The answer is yes! Freedom is possible and it comes from the practice of mindfulness. When you clean the bathroom with mindfulness, aware of every moment, aware that you are cleaning the bathroom, you are cultivating your freedom. But if you clean the bathroom in forgetfulness, being caught in your anger, your jealousy, in your worries and fear, there is no freedom at all.

Bell

When we practice walking meditation we invest one hundred percent of ourselves in the act of walking. When our body and our mind are fully concentrated on the act of making a step, the energy that helps us to do that is mindfulness and when mindfulness is there we are concentrated and the object of our concentration is the step we are making. Mindfulness plus concentration will bring forth the solidity, the freedom and the happiness. During the whole time we are walking we keep the energy of mindfulness alive in us, we are entering in the present moment. And when you look upon a person walking, sitting, lying down, cooking, watering the vegetable garden you can see if that person is anchored in the present moment or not.

In the here and the now. Our practice is to learn how to be anchored in the here and the now, all the time. Not to lose ourselves in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness means, we allow ourselves to be carried away by the past, by the future and so on. That is the way of cultivating freedom and when you do that, your brother, your sister around you will learn from you. She will go back to herself, he will go back to himself and walk like you do, breathe like you do, sit like you do and you become a bell of mindfulness for other people. Everyone is practicing freedom and we know that the amount of freedom determines the amount of happiness we have.

When you go back to the present moment you have a chance to recognize many of the wonders of life that are available in the present moment. You need to be in touch with them for your nourishment, for your healing and transformation because there are many things that are refreshing and healing and nourishing around us, and even within us is a lot of goodness. When we go back to ourselves we recognize things that are not good, but if we continue to be there in us we will be able to touch the goodness within us. The same is true of the other person. When you focus your attention on him or her you may have the impression that person does not have enough goodness but that is your first impression only. If you really have enough mindfulness and concentration you will be able to discover that the person also has the potential to be a good person and if you know how to touch the goodness within her then she will be transformed into a very pleasant person.

If you live in a superficial way we can recognize only what is wrong, but we are not capable of realizing what is not wrong in us, in the other person and around us. We have the tendency to think that what is wrong is overwhelming and that is why we have a lot of depression and anger and fear but if we are capable of establishing ourselves firmly in the here and the now we will be able to recognize the positive elements that are still available in us and around us.

Suppose you get into a garden and you see a number of trees dying and you become depressed. You are not capable of noticing that there are still many trees that are healthy and beautiful. You should be able to notice the presence of these beautiful and healthy trees in order to enjoy them. And if you are supported by these beautiful, positive aspects of life you will be strong enough in order to take care of what is wrong, namely the trees that are dying. We protect what is not wrong and we try to help with what is wrong and that is our situation.

To allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the negative feeling when we touch what is wrong, is not a good thing to do. Therefore we should be able to be there in order to recognize the positive elements for our nourishment and healing. And we need a friend, a brother, a sister who practices in order to help us realize that. A good dharma brother, a good dharma sister will tell you that there are still many wonderful things around, and if you know how to be in touch with them you get the nourishment and healing that you need. Then you will be strong enough to take care of what is wrong.

There are things that are very much to our liking, but mindfulness helps us not to be possessive, attached to them. We know that the fresh breeze, the clean air, the beautiful sky are all wonderful and we can profit from them, and we need time. But you don't need to possess them, you don't need to be attached to them. You don't have to make them your own,

preventing the other people to profit from them. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that can help you to identify and to recognize what is there, and also to keep you free.

You see something beautiful, you see someone beautiful, and if you have freedom in you will be capable of enjoying that beauty. Mindfulness will help you not to be attached to it, not to be a slave of it, not to try to possess that to make it yours, and to prevent others from enjoying it. Mindfulness has been described as the act of recognizing things as they are, mere recognition of what is there. When we see a rose blooming, we recognize there is a rose blooming. When we see that the rose is beautiful we say, the rose is beautiful, simple recognition of what is there. You do not try to be there to tie it to you, to possess it, to be attached to it, or to run away from it, to suppress it or to try to discriminate against it.

When we do something negative your mindfulness will tell you, this is something negative. When you see something not beautiful, your mindfulness will help you to see, this is not so beautiful. Simple recognition of what is there, and how it is; that is the practice of mindfulness. Suppose you have a feeling of joy and breathing in you are aware of the feeling of joy in yourself. Mindfulness is the capacity of recognizing that joy is there in you; that is the practice. And mindfulness also helps you not to be a possessor of joy, trying to possess that joy, trying to make that joy exclusively yours. And that is why when that feeling of joy is no longer there you don't suffer.

When you have a feeling of non-joy arising in you, an unpleasant feeling, mindfulness will help you to recognize it as an unpleasant feeling. Mere recognition that it is an unpleasant feeling and you are still free from that feeling. Breathing in I know that a feeling is in me, breathing out I smile to the feeling. Breathing in I know that this feeling is unpleasant, breathing out I smile to the unpleasant feeling in me. You recognize the feeling and yet you are not a slave of that feeling, whether that feeling is pleasant or unpleasant. In both cases you remain a free person and as a free person you don't suffer much, that is the secret.

Even if you have a physical pain. If you have a physical pain mindfulness will help you to know, to be aware that a physical pain is there. Breathing in I know that there is a physical pain in me, breathing out I smile to the physical pain, and somehow you may remain a free person. If you try very hard to suppress the physical pain, you try to resist, your suffering is increased by ten times, twenty times because you are not free. If you are free you suffer very little, if you are not free you suffer ten times, twenty times more, that is why mindfulness can help. I repeat this, if it is a pleasant feeling, recognize it simply as a pleasant feeling, not to be attached to it, not try to possess it, not try to make it last longer, not try to make it eternal. Because if you do you will suffer, because everything is impermanent, including your pleasant feeling. So, whether the pleasant feeling is there or is not there, you are a free person and that is the key of your happiness.

If the unpleasant feeling is there, recognize it as being there, not trying to resist, not trying to combat, and then you are still a free person, you don't have to suffer much because an unpleasant feeling is also impermanent. Any feeling is impermanent, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and you are not touched by the unpleasant feeling, whether it is mental or physical. When you have physical pain you tend to worry a lot, you tend to resist a lot, you really want to hurry in order to remove the physical pain. And that kind of tension, that kind of resistance, that kind of attitude will make the physical pain in you double, triple, ten times, one hundred times more intense, that is why mindfulness practice is just to recognize it as it is, smiling to it. The practice of mindfulness is to maintain your freedom in order for you not to suffer.

The Buddha offers us this example. Suppose someone is struck by an arrow. He is suffering. Suppose a second arrow comes and strikes exactly that same spot, now the pain will not be double, the pain can be ten times or fifty times more intense. So, if you have a mental or physical pain and you recognize it with freedom then you just suffer a little bit, but if you resist, if you are eager to suppress it, if you get angry, if you get a lot of worries and fear then

your unpleasant feelings will be one hundred times more intense and you suffer a lot. And that is the second arrow. Never allow the second arrow to hit you, that is the practice. And only the freedom, with the practice of mindfulness, you can avoid the second arrow to come and hit you, simple recognition, mere recognition, is a very wonderful practice. And if you know how to practice mindfulness of relaxation, mindfulness of smiling, of breathing and then the feeling whether mental or physical will diminish and you know that if you are allowed to be touched by the healing, refreshing elements within and around you there will be a transformation and then the unpleasant feeling in you whether mental or physical will be relieved little by little. You know what to do and what not to do in order for the pain not to increase. And to know what to do and what not to do is the job of mindfulness because if you are mindful you know the situation well. If you are in the here and the now you know the situation better, and if you know the situation better you know what to do, and especially what not to do, in order not to make the situation worse. That is why mindfulness practice is very crucial in our daily life.

When we come to a practice center where people practice mindfulness, we have a chance to learn the art of mindful living. You have the chance to learn walking in mindfulness so you can enjoy every step you take. Walking in mindfulness is what all of us are supposed to do in Plum Village and the technique of walking is simple. Produce your true presence, body and mind united and make one step. Not to allow yourself to be carried away by the past or by the future, your projects, by your fear and just be there and enjoy making one step: with freedom, of course. Freedom from the past, freedom from the future, freedom from your projects, freedom from your resistance. Allow yourself to be there in the here and the now and make one step and you become a Buddha; a walking Buddha and if you are capable of making one step like that you know that you can make a second step and you can make also a third step. And your walking becomes very healing and transforming and you are supported by other brothers and sisters around you because they are practicing the same walking with freedom and enjoying every step they make. Walking as a free person. Walk like a free person and not a slave.

When we say the Kingdom of God is at hand, you have to say, are you ready to enter the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is available, the Pure Land is available, it is there, it is only you who are not ready. You have no freedom, therefore the Kingdom of God is not yours, the Buddha Land is not yours. The Kingdom of God is only for those who are free and cultivating our freedom is your practice. Life is full of wonders, if you are free you come in touch with all these wonders, they all belong to the Kingdom of God. That is why, to allow yourself to be carried by your resistance, your fear, your anger is to run away on the Kingdom of God. Knowing that the Kingdom of God is there waiting for you with all the wonders, abandon all these kinds of worries and fears, and anger and resistance in breath, outbreath and produce your true presence, your freedom and with only one step you can step into the Kingdom of God.

I remember twenty years ago speaking in a church in the vicinity of Philadelphia, a church attended by the black people I made that declaration for the first time; you don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact, you have to be very alive. Free yourself, go back to the here and the now and with only one step you can already enter into the Kingdom of God. And during another retreat in Plum Village with Catholic nuns and monks, during the time we sit in the woods after walking meditation I turned to my friends and I said, "the Kingdom of God is now or never..." so be ready for it. And your practice is to walk in the Kingdom of God every day and if you are capable of doing it in Plum Village, you will be able to do it in Philadelphia, in New York City, Zurich, Bangkok and so on. So this is the place to train yourself to walk in the Kingdom of God. If you wait until you die it may be too late. And to me the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is available only in the here and the now; the message is very clear, otherwise we waste our life.

With our steps, with our mindful steps, we get anchored in the here and the now - the only address of life. The only real address of life: all the other addresses are fake. The real address of life is here and now, including the zip code. And if you ask the address of the Kingdom of God, the address of the Buddha, of Bodhisattvas I will tell you, the same address, here and now. Therefore our practice is to go back all the time to the here and the now in order to encounter true life and in order to encounter the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. And if your practice is strong, authentic, then you get it today, you don't need tomorrow, you can get it today. And the more you practice the more you enjoy, the practice is enjoyable. You don't practice for the future, you practice for the here and the now because the Dharma is described as not a matter of time, transcending time. The Dharma is for the here and the now.

With the practice of mindful breathing also you get anchored in the here and the now. Breathe in and out in such a way that you establish yourself always in the here and the now, while you eat, while you drink, while you wash dishes, while you sit with your son, your daughter, your brother, your sister. The practice of mindful breathing or mindful walking is very crucial, very basic in Plum Village.

The Buddha said, if you practice mindfulness in seven years you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he said, you don't need seven years, one year may be enough if you practice mindfulness and then in one year you get your freedom. And after that he said, maybe you don't need one year, you need seven months and if you practice with all your heart in seven months you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he looked at his disciples and he said, maybe you don't need seven months, you need seven days. Because if you get down to the practice, you practice with all your heart in seven days you get your freedom, it means your total happiness. And then he looked at them again and said, maybe you don't need seven days, you need one day, twenty four hours. You put all your strength, your heart into it and then in twenty four hours you can get your freedom and your happiness. And these words are recorded at the end of a discourse called Sattipattana Sutta, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It is very meaningful, because every minute of the practice can already bring you joy and emancipation. It means that with only one step you can already get some freedom, with another step you get more freedom. One in breath you get some freedom, one out breath you can more freedom, you are cultivating your freedom all the time. because no happiness, no peace, no stability will be possible without freedom. So we can attribute, we can describe that the practice of mindfulness is the practice of freedom.

This morning we talked about the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners as means to protect our freedom and to develop our freedom and now we are talking about the practice of breathing, of walking, of cleaning, as a practice of freedom also. Freedom is so precious for us, and that is why we come to the Sangha, we come to the practice center.

In our tradition, in our Zen tradition if you are in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall you have to keep very quiet, very still. You are expected not to produce any noise. As soon as you arrive in the Dharma hall or in the meditation hall you sit down and you begin to practice mindful breathing. You don't talk, you don't do anything to create any noise. That is very important because the noise, even small noises, will harm the practice of other people. Out of respect for the Sangha we should be sitting very still and not making movements or other noises. This is in the tradition. It is very helpful and we have to learn how to do it. There should be no talking in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall.

Mindfulness of the Body in the Body

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 12, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the second of December 1999, and we are in the New Hamlet for our Dharma talk. We are in our winter retreat. We have been speaking about the five skandhas, the five elements that make up our own person, and that is exactly the object of our meditation. To meditate means to be aware of what is going on in the domain of the five skandhas, and the Buddha gave us very specific recommendations how to recognize these elements, to look deeply into their nature, to understand deeply the nature of these elements, and that understanding will lead to our liberation, to our freedom.

We know that the first aggregate, the first element, is called form. Form here means our body. We care very much about our form, but do we really care about our form? We buy a lot -- fruit, medicine, cosmetics, and so on, for the sake of our form, but do we really care for it? Do we know exactly what our form is? Do we understand it? Do we know how to take good care of it? If we don't, then we have to learn from the Buddha, our teacher. And the Buddha advises us, first of all, to go back to our form, to our body, and make peace with it, because we may be at war with our body. We may have mistreated our body, we may have made our body suffer a lot, and between us and our body there may be a lot of conflict. Going back to your body and embracing it and reconciling with it, that is the first act of meditation.

There are four domains of meditation, in fact the object of meditation is of four kinds. The first is our body, the second is our feelings, the third is our mind, and the fourth is the object of our mind. Mind here means consciousness. We don't know enough about our body, we don't know enough about our feelings, we don't know enough about our mind, and we don't know enough about the objects of our mind. Therefore, to meditate means to go back to these four realms and try to understand and to take care. These four objects of our meditation are sometimes called the foundations of mindfulness. According to this teaching, our breath is part of our body. That is why going back to our breath is already going back to our body. All Buddhist manuals of meditation practice begin with going back to our breath, because if you know how to go back to your breath, you go back to your body very easily, and then you go back to your feelings and your mind, and then you go back to the objects of your mind. Objects of your mind means objects of perception. This morning we learned about the foundation, the base, the object of our perception. So, our breath is included in our body and that is why as a practitioner we should be able to go back to our breathing in order to go back entirely to our body. Our breath can be considered to be a wonderful vehicle bringing us back to our body and our feelings, our mind, etc. We don't need a lot of time in order to go back to our body and our feelings, if we know how to use that wonderful vehicle called breathing, and this is called mindful breathing. Because breathing is something you do every day, but most of us do not breathe mindfully, and therefore we cannot go back to our body and our feelings. Our practice is to learn how to breathe mindfully and if you breathe mindfully you are back already to your breath, namely to part of your body. If you continue to practice mindful breathing, then you will go back entirely to your body. Go back to our body, reconcile with it, get to know what is going on in our body. The wrong that we have done to our body, the conflicts we are having with our body, and we will know what to do and what not to do in order to be on good terms with our body.

So the Anapanasatti Sutta, the Discourse on Mindful Breathing is something that every meditator has to learn, has to study. The day I discovered the Discourse on Mindful Breathing I felt as if I was the happiest person on earth, really a heritage. Suppose you go around and you discover a field where a lot of treasure is buried in it. You know that you have become a very rich person. You will be able to buy anything. That was my feeling when I discovered the Sutra on Mindful Breathing. I had the feeling that I had discovered a treasure and it made me very happy. That is why I have nourished the idea to translate it and to give commentaries to it, and to make suggestions as to how to make use of the Sutra on Mindful Breathing. Now that book is available, a translation of the Discourse on Mindful Breathing from both Pali and Chinese, with commentaries and with suggestions as to how to apply mindful breathing into our daily life. If you are a serious practitioner you should learn about the techniques, the art of mindful breathing. It is very important. As soon as you embrace the practice you can feel better right away. It's good to be home to yourself and your breath is already your home, the door of your home. Closing the door, going into the home, you know that you are already home.

If you continue with the practice of mindful breathing, you will go back not only to your body, but you will go back to your feelings. All the mental formations that manifest in yourself including fear, desire, love, despair, hope, you will go back to them. You will recognize them, you will embrace them, you will begin to look deeply into their nature, and you will get the right kind of understanding that will set you free.

Last year we offered a twenty-one day retreat in North America on the practice of mindful breathing. Twenty-one days, and we only learned about mindful breathing and we did use the Discourse on Mindful Breathing during our retreat. We hope that the Dharma talks given during that retreat, also the session for questions and answers will be made into a book so that people who did not have a chance to attend the retreat, could get a taste of the retreat by reading the book.

Inquire about the art of mindful breathing from your brother, from your sister in the Dharma. Enjoy the practice of mindful breathing, it is very rewarding. I assure you that when you begin to practice it, you will feel better right away.

Breathing in , I know that I am breathing in,
Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.
Breathing in, I feel alive,
Breathing out, I smile.

It is wonderful. You can change your life right away.

We know that the practice in Plum Village is to always try to go back to the present moment, to the here and the now. Because we know that only in the here and the now can we touch life deeply, and learning how to live deeply each moment of our daily life is our true practice. Therefore, mindful breathing can always bring us back to the here and the now. If you lose your mindful breathing, you will lose the present moment. It's not that mindful breathing is the only way to go back to the present moment, there are other ways, like mindful walking. Mindful walking can bring you back to the here and the now also. Mindful washing, mindful eating, there are many kinds of practice that can bring us back to the here and the now and touch life deeply, but mindful breathing can be practiced any time of the day. And if you are anchored in your mindful breathing, you don't risk losing the here and the now, namely losing life, because life is available only in the here and the now. So let us cultivate the art of mindful breathing in order for us to be able to settle in the here and the

now, in our true home so that we will profit fully from the fact that we are alive and life is available with all its wonders.

When you practice mindful breathing you have a chance to go back to your body and recognize your body as your home. When you stand like this, “Breathing in, I am aware of my body, my whole body; breathing out, I smile to my whole body.” So standing like this you can practice. Or if you sit on a chair, you might like to practice, “Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body; breathing out, I smile to my body.” It’s very nice of you to recognize your body and smile to it. If you cannot do it, how can you do it for another person? Smile to yourself, smile to your body, recognize its presence, it’s very kind of you to do so. In the four positions of your body, you recognize your body: standing, sitting, walking, lying down, the four basic positions of your body. When you stand you are aware that your body is in a standing position; when you walk you are aware of the walking position of your body, that’s what we do in walking meditation; when we sit, we are aware that we are sitting; and when we lie down, we are aware of the lying down position of our body.

Body as a whole, body in the four positions, body in its various movements. When you bend down and pick up the marker, you are aware that you are bending down. When you stand upright, you are aware that you are standing upright. So not only are you aware of the position of your body but you are also aware of each movement of your body. In the beginning you do it slowly so that you can be aware of it easily. Suppose I hold this, and I slowly put it down. I become mindful all the way through. And now I have the intention to pick up that marker. I do it slowly so that I can be aware of each moment of the movement. Picking it up I am aware, bringing it closer to me I am aware, being aware of the movement.

When you walk, that is a movement. The mind is not thinking of anything else. Your mind is focused on the movement of walking. One hundred percent of your mind is put into the act of making a step. In the Vipassana tradition sometimes they do it like this: you are about to lift your right foot, and when you lift your right foot you are aware that you are lifting, so you use the word, “lifting”. Then when you move, you say, “moving”, and then you place it down, “placing”. “Lifting, moving, placing; lifting, moving, placing; lifting, moving, placing”. That is the idea. But if you are not careful, you become an automat, you do it automatically, and life will disappear. Do it in such a way that life is still there, do it in such a way that the act of meditation remains enjoyable. Because if you make life disappear you become a machine, and that is not meditation. You understand? Lifting, that’s mindfulness, moving, that’s mindfulness, placing, that’s mindfulness. Yes, you can do that - but with the condition that life still remains with you and the act of meditation becomes a joyful, pleasant act because you are not practicing for the future, you are practicing in order to live your life much more deeply, cultivating solidity, freedom, and happiness in the here and the now. Remember the three characteristics of the Dharma: not a matter of time, dealing with the present moment, joyful, happiness. So you are free to adopt any kind of practice with the condition that you retain life, joy, and you continue to cultivate your solidity, your freedom, and your joy. “Lifting, moving, placing” is okay, is good with the condition that you don’t become a machine, with the condition that the practice should bring you joy and happiness in the here and the now. Because you do not practice for the future, you practice for the present moment, and you assure a future because the future is made only with one element, the present. So taking good care of the present, you take care of the future. Don’t worry about the future.

So when you walk from here to the kitchen in order to serve the food, don’t say “I have to walk to the kitchen in order to get the food”, don’t say “I have to”. Say, “I am

enjoying walking to the kitchen”, and each step is an end by itself. The steps are no longer means to arrive at an end. This is very important in Buddhist practice. There is no distinction between means and end. In the world they say, “I will do everything in order to reach that end.” It’s not like that in the Buddhist practice because everything you do is by itself an end. Everything you do should be in terms of the Dharma, it means everything you do should cultivate freedom, solidity, and happiness. So you know how to walk. No distinction between means and end. That is the practice of Buddhism. Remember: there is no way to happiness, happiness is the way. There is no way to enlightenment, enlightenment is the way. Every time you make a step, you make an act of enlightenment. Because what is enlightenment, enlightenment is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is going on, and that is enlightenment. I am enlightened on the fact that I am making a step. Each step has its own value. Every act, every step that you make should be an act of enlightenment, a work of art. It should have beauty in it, it should have the good, the beautiful, and the true in it.

Remember, in the practice of Buddhism there is no distinction between means and end. When you wash your dishes, make every moment of the time of washing into a work of art, an act of enlightenment. Then you will see that it is wonderful, it’s delightful to wash the dishes. That’s the way the Buddha washes his bowl. When the Buddha washes his bowl, he is a true artist. He enjoys washing his bowl, he has perfect happiness in the act of washing his bowl. And you are his student and you learn to wash your bowl like the Buddha. You learn to walk like him, you learn to breathe like him, you learn to smile like him.

Enlightenment should be in the here and the now. Enlightenment is not a matter of the future and you can practice enlightenment with every moment of your daily life. Walking, sitting, eating, smiling. That is possible right away in the beginning of the practice. Going back to your breath, recognizing the positions of your body, recognizing every act performed by your body. We should learn how to be authentic, we don’t practice for the sake of the form, we do not perform.

When we practice being aware of our body in its parts, that is what we do when we begin our total, deep relaxation. We lay down and first of all we go back to our breath: “Breathing in, I am aware of my in breath; breathing out, I am aware of my out breath”. When your breathing is solid, when the quality of your breathing has improved, then become aware of your body as a whole, in the lying position, and just breathe in and out, and enjoy the presence of your body. Give your body a chance to be there without doing anything, total relaxation. That is the practice of love, directed to your body. “Oh my body, I know you are there.” Be restful, be relaxed. Then you begin to practice being mindful of each part of your body. “Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes; breathing out, I smile to my eyes.” You might do it during one in breath and out breath, or you might do it in ten in breaths and out breaths. You can stay with your eyes as long as you like. Just become aware of your eyes and smile lovingly to them. Your eyes are so wonderful, a wonderful pair of eyes in good condition. Then you switch to your ears: “Breathing out, I am aware of my ears; breathing in, I smile to my ears”, and so on. You go from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, going through all the parts of your body. You practice scanning your body with a kind of beam, not laser, but mindfulness.

When you come down to your shoulders, you practice: “Breathing in, I am aware of my shoulders; breathing out, I smile to my shoulders,” and you help your shoulders to relax and not to be stiff. When you come to your lungs, you practice mindfulness in order to embrace your lungs. “Breathing in, I know I am aware of my lungs; breathing out, I smile to

my lungs.” They work so hard, I don’t give them enough clean air. “Breathing in, I am aware of my heart; breathing out, I smile to my heart.” Now I have to stop drinking alcohol, because I really care for my heart. So you go through your body, you scan your body with the light of mindfulness, recognizing, embracing, smiling to it. That is the teaching of the Buddha, the recommendations made by the Buddha. He told us to take care of our bodies, to go back to them, to be kind to them, to recognize them as a whole and to recognize various parts of our bodies.

In the sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha said, Suppose a farmer went up to the cellar and brings down a bag of seed. He opened one end of the bag and he took the other end of the bag and allowed all the kinds of seeds in the bag to flow on the floor. With eyes in good condition, the farmer recognized: that this is the seed of mung beans, this is the seed of kidney beans, this is the seed of corn, and he distinguished every kind of seed. So the meditator does the same thing. She recognizes her eyes as eyes and smiles to them, she recognizes her lungs as lungs and smiles to them. That is mindfulness of body in the body.

Then the Buddha suggests that we go back to our body and look at the body, becoming aware of elements that can be found in the body: namely the element earth, the element water, the element fire, and the element air. “Breathing in, I recognize the element of solidity in me,” and the element of solidity is represented by earth. It may look solid in the beginning, but slowly we recognize that there is nothing so solid within it, like in the case of a nuclear physicist. “Breathing in, I recognize the element of earth in me; breathing out, I smile to that element in me.” You begin to see more deeply into the nature of your body. “Breathing in, I recognize the element water in me; breathing out, I smile to the element water in me.” I am made of water, at least 70%. It’s very useful, it will bring us knowledge, vision, insight about the true nature of our body. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element fire in my body.” Heat, 37 degrees. If that element increases, I will have fever, I will die. If that element is lower than 37 degrees, I will be sick too. So, “Breathing in, I am aware of the element heat in me; breathing out, I smile to the element heat in me.” The art of the doctor is to keep the four elements in harmony. Health is the result of the harmony of the four elements. In the Asian tradition, a good doctor, a good physician is the one who can help you to retain the balance, the harmony of the four elements.

In the words of encouragement given by Master Quy Son he said “Although this body is supported by the four elements, these four elements very often oppose each other.” Sometimes one is too strong, sometimes one is too weak, and therefore we’ve got trouble. “Even though this body is supported by the four elements, very often these four elements are not in balance.” So the role of a doctor is to help keep these four elements in balance.

“I am aware of the element heat in me; I smile to the element heat in me.” Even when you have a fever, try to smile to your fever, to the heat in your body and you will feel better. If you worry about it, the situation will get worse. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element air in me.” The element air is so important, and the oxygen that we get into our body by the way of our lungs is so important. Our blood always goes back to our lungs; after having received some oxygen it becomes very bright, very red and it carries that oxygen to other cells in the body and releases this oxygen. So breathing in and out, we help our blood to renew itself, to get the oxygen it needs in order to share with all other cells in the body because life is a process of conditions, and we need oxygen for the processes to continue. So the element air is very important. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element air in me; breathing out, I smile to it.”

The Buddha prepared very carefully the blooming of our enlightenment, and we can see in his teaching a lot of compassion and understanding. He understood human beings well and he told us how to take care of our bodies, how to look deeply into our bodies and get the kind of insight we need not be caught in our fear, our worries, and so on.

Once we recognize the four elements in our bodies, we also recognize the four elements outside of our bodies and we know that they are always together. Our life, our organism is an open system. Energy and matter goes through it every second in order to follow processes of changing, to continue. That is why we call our organism an open system. It's always changing. Matter, energy continue to go through it, life and death happen in every moment, and yet there is a continuation. A continuation happens at the same time with change. We learn about *alaya* --*alaya* is something changing all the time, but continuing all the time. Changing all the time but continuing all the time, whether we know it or not.

So there are things we might like to do, we might enjoy doing in the practice of the contemplation of the body in the body. In the sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha used the terms, "contemplation of the body in the body, or as the body." It means that when we go back to our body we don't consider it only as an object of our perception, but we have to identify with it, we have to remove the frontier between subject and object of perception. That is why the expression, "contemplation of the body in the body" is very important, because in order to really understand something, you have to be with it. You have to be it, you have to remove the frontier between the inquirer and the object being inquired into. If you want to understand someone, put yourself into his skin, and then you can understand. If you continue to look at him as an object, you can never understand that person. This is very true. If you are a couple of friends, if you are father and son or mother and daughter, if you really want to understand each other, you have to become the other person. The only way to understand fully is to become the object of your understanding. This is very important in Buddhist practice. If you still maintain the distinction, the barrier between the object of understanding and the subject of understanding, then true understanding cannot happen.

There is a very nice story about it, the story of a grain of salt. The grain of salt would like to know how salty the water in the ocean is, the degree of salinity of the ocean. "I am a grain of salt, I am very salty. I wonder whether the water in the ocean is that salty." Then a teacher comes and says, "Dear grain of salt, the only way for you to really know the degree of salinity of the ocean is to jump into it." And when the grain of salt jumps into it, it becomes one with the sea water and its understanding is perfect.

So don't expect to understand someone or something fully until you become one with it. In the French language there is a very nice word, the word "comprendre". Comprendre means understand, it means to understand something is to pick it up and to become one with it. "Com" means to be one with it. As far as you are separated from it, don't expect to understand it. That is why the Buddhist practice of meditation is to look at reality in such a way that the frontier will no longer be there. That kind of understanding is called the wisdom of non-discrimination. 'nirvikalpajñana' 'vikalpa' means distinction, discrimination; 'nir' means no. Non discrimination, wisdom. 'jñana' means wisdom. This practice goes very far, not only in terms of understanding, but of action. Suppose you give something to someone, you have to give it to him or to her in such a way that there will be no giver and no receiver. If you still think that you are a giver and that person is a receiver, then that is not the best way of giving, that is not *dana paramita*. As far as discrimination is still there, that is not perfect giving. You give because the other person is in need of it and the act is very natural. You

don't think of yourself as the one who gives and you don't think of him or her as the person who receives the gift, and you don't say, "He is not grateful at all." If you are really practicing perfect giving, you don't have these ideas. Whether that person is grateful or not grateful, you just give. That's non discrimination. So this is not only true in the domain of perception but in the domain of action. The bodhisattva does everything for everyone but never takes credit for it.

So the first object of our mindfulness, of our meditation, is the body. And you know exactly what to do because the Buddha was very careful in offering the teaching. He told us how to go back to our breath, to make peace with our breath, to improve our quality of life with our breath and then embrace, recognize our body as a whole in the four positions, in various movements, in each part and in the elements that have made up the body. There is a discourse specially spoken for the contemplation of the body in the body, called the Contemplation of the Body. In the Madhya Agama there is a sutra called 'The Sutra on the Contemplation of the Body'.

Today we have mentioned a very important teaching and practice. Practice in such a way that every act you make becomes an act of enlightenment, an act that can bring you solidity and peace and freedom right away. Whether you sweep the ground, whether you clean the bathroom, whether you cook the breakfast for the Sangha, try to enjoy every act you do and consider every act you do as an act of enlightenment. Be the perfect artist, be the real son, daughter, disciple of the Buddha. This is a very important teaching, a very important practice. Your life will change right away and peace, happiness, solidity, non-fear will be yours. You have to cultivate it every day. The true, the good, and the beautiful can be seen in every act of your daily life.

The means are the end

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 5, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 5th December, 1999 and we are in the Upper Hamlet during our winter retreat. Last time we discussed about means and ends and we learned that in the practice of Buddhism there is no distinction between means and ends and means should be considered to be ends by themselves. This is a very strong practice and we should be able to rely on the Sangha in order to do it.

When you go to the Buddha Hall or to the Dharma Hall you know that you have something to do there: sitting meditation, or listening to a Dharma talk, or cleaning the hall but going there is also a practice. You are requested to sweep the meditation hall in mindfulness, you are supposed to sit beautifully when you listen to a Dharma talk, you are supposed to be concentrated, to be mindful during your sitting meditation so the practice takes place in the meditation hall, but we should know that the practice also takes place during your walking there.

That is why we should try to be practicing during the time we walk to the meditation hall and if you succeed in every step you take then the sitting meditation, or the Dharma talk or the cleaning of meditation hall will be a success.

Because we have the habit of wanting things to be done that is why we tend to neglect, to underestimate the value of the means.

At this time of autumn, I usually rake the leaves in the hermitage. I do this every three days or so and I use a rake. I know that raking the leaves is to have a clean path in order to walk, to do running meditation and so on; I run every day at least two times -I practice mindful running and I rake the leaves in that way(mindfully). Raking the leaves is not only to have only a clean path to run or to walk, but raking the leaves is just to enjoy raking the leaves. So I hold the rake in such a way that I can be happy and solid during the time of holding the rake. And every movement I do I want to make it into an act of enlightenment, an act of joy, an act of peace, so I am not in a hurry, because I see that the act of raking is as wonderful as having a clean path. I would not be satisfied with less than that. Every stroke I make should bring me joy and solidity and freedom. I should be entirely myself during the act of raking the leaves and raking the leaves is no longer a means to arrive at an end that is called having a clean path.

And you don't need to wait for a long time; if you can make one stroke like that, one movement like that, fully investing yourself into the act of raking the leaves then you will be rewarded right away. That is a perfect piece of art that you make because each movement is a work of art.

The same is true when you practice walking. Each step you make should be a perfect work of art, each step can bring you solidity, sovereignty because you do not walk like a slave, you walk like a free person. You walk like a Buddha because you have wanted to be a disciple, a daughter or a son of the Enlightened One, you want to be his continuation, that is why you are capable of making a step with sovereignty, you are fully in control of yourself. You are fully present in the here and the now and you enjoy that step. So walking meditation is not to arrive in the meditation hall. To arrive at the meditation hall is what you want, but you want more than that, because you arrive at the meditation hall several times a day and sometimes ten or twenty arrivals like that don't make any difference. So, one step is enough for you to arrive. I have arrived! With one step.

That is our practice but there is a habit energy that prevents you from doing so. You are used to running to believe that happiness is not possible here and now, happiness is possible only in the future. That kind of belief, that kind of habit energy has been there for a long time,

transmitted by many generations of ancestors and coming to Plum Village is to have a chance to see it; that you are governed by your habit energy, by the tendency to run all the time. You are not capable of being in the here and the now in order to touch the wonders of life that are available.

We have plenty of chances to practice. We know we wash your clothes, you are your dishes, you sweep the ground, you tend the garden, there are many things that you can do, but don't do it the way they do it in the world. Make it into a practice, a good practice and you will be rewarded right away and you know that you are dealing with your habit energy. The habit energy says, quick, quick, go, quick, quick, do it right away! The deadline is close but the practice is telling you the opposite thing, don't run, enjoy it, the here and the now is the only thing you have, happiness cannot be possible outside the here and the now, so you have two things contradicting each other and that is why the word training means that you slowly get over the habit energy and give yourself another habit energy that is good. The habit energy that you want to cultivate is the capacity to be in the here and the now and live every moment of your daily life deeply. Rake the leaves, enjoy it! Cook the breakfast! Enjoy fully the act of cooking. Wash the dishes! Enjoy fully the act of washing.

In the Hermitage every day I wash the dishes, every day I boil the rice and I take care of the flowers, of the plants and my practice is to enjoy every minute while doing these things. Yes, to write a poem is wonderful, to write an article is wonderful, to give a Dharma talk is wonderful but it is equally wonderful to take care of the bush, to take care of the plants, to wash the dishes and so on. Because it is very enriching, it is very rewarding, it can bring you a lot of peace and joy and solidity.

We know that happiness would not be possible if we have no stability and solidity and that is why we have to cultivate our stability, our solidity and offer it to ourselves because without the ground of stability and solidity no real peace, no real happiness could be possible. That is why learning how to rake the leaves, learning how to sweep the ground, learning how to wash the dishes is very important. Don't say that sitting meditation is most important or walking meditation is most important, or listening to the Dharma talk is most important. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to rake the leaves. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to wash the dishes, properly and enjoy it.

And in Plum Village we have the advantage of having many brothers and sisters doing the same and when we see one of them doing that we are supported. They don't do anything. They just do it, they don't say anything to us; they just do it. And when we see them doing that we have a chance to go back to ourselves and do it too.

And the practicing community is a great gift, like the sunshine. Everyone in France, maybe a lot of French people have the sun today but maybe because many of do not have the capacity of going home to the here and the now that is why the sunshine does not mean much to them. But if you know how to breathe in and become aware of the sunshine, you have a different kind of sun, the sun is for you And not for those who are so busy, who get lost all the time in their worries, in the past, in the future. The moon is supposed to be everyone's but there are those of us who never see the moon, never profit from the moon, never enjoy the moon.

And we live in Plum Village together for a week, for a month or three months, for a year and we practice together. There are those of us who are quite happy, there are those of us who are not quite happy yet, the same environment, the same Sangha, the same practice and yet we receive differently the amount of happiness and peace and stability and joy. And what makes that difference? What makes the difference is our capacity to put into practice the teaching that is given. And the Buddha was quite clear on this, life is available only in the here and the now, with all its wonders, if you continue to run, these wonders of life are not yours. So stop! Smile to the sun, smile to the moon, smile to your brother or sisters and specially, smile to yourself.

Recognize that you are there. You need to be nourished by peace, by joy. You have deprived yourself of these elements. It is you who have deprived yourself of peace and joy and nourishment and healing. Now the Dharma is to help you to stop that course of living. Look at yourself, smile to yourself, be kind to yourself, treat yourself with the practice. Learn how to walk, learn how to breathe and smile, learn how to rake the leaves on the front yard. It is very important. The Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is right there for you to touch.

Bell

If you have observed the monks and the nuns, if you have observed them in Plum Village you will notice that while they walk they don't talk, when they talk they stop to talk and to listen, and after talking and listening they resume their walking. Why do they do like that? Because when they talk and listen they want to invest 100% of themselves into the act of talking and listening. That is why they don't talk any longer while they are walking; they want to invest themselves 100% in the act of walking. They want to make real steps, steps that can bring them stability, solidity, freedom because they know that stability, solidity is the ground of happiness so they walk in order to cultivate that and to enjoy it at the same time.

That is why, if you come to Plum Village following that kind of example you join the practice. Not talking during walking is not a rule because we don't want to be victims of rules, we don't want any rule at all, we just want to practice. If you don't talk, that is because we want to practice. It is not that talking is a crime. But if you talk during the practice you ruin the practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha to be attached to rules is something that you are not encouraged to do. We should look at it as a practice and not as rules, like the ten novice precepts that we have here that you have heard yesterday. These are not rules for the novice. They are not there in order to restrict the freedom the happiness of the novice. They are there to help the novice to lead the happy life of a novice. Because these precepts should be considered to be the practice of mindfulness and if you practice accordingly you preserve your freedom, your beauty, your happiness. And if you think that these ten things are rules you have to submit yourself to, you have to surrender yourself to, you don't get it, you don't get the real thing and that is why the Buddha said, don't be the slave of rules and rituals. Rituals and rules, we don't need them; we need only the practice.

When we enter the Dharma hall everyone stands up and joins the palms. That is not a rule, that is the practice. And when the teacher enters the hall he is not affected by the respect shown to him. He practices walking also, mindfully, the practice of mindful walking is his practice. Walking mindfully is his practice and standing up and breathing and showing respect is your practice. These two things are equally important. And if you look on it as a ritual you are wrong. If you look at it as a rule you are wrong, you have to look at it as your practice and good practice can be recognized. When the teacher walks he should be a free person, he is not affected by pride, complex of arrogance, that is his practice. Your practice is to be respectful to the teacher, to enjoy standing like this, to breathe in, to breathe out, and smile and touch the many generations of teachers in history. When you get in touch with your teacher you get in touch with his teacher, her teacher, you get in touch with many generations of teachers, you get in touch with the Buddha, so that is your practice.

That is why you don't complain that you have to stand too long and the teacher is walking too slowly. The teacher practices his practice and you practice your practice and everyone is profiting from the practice and you know whether your practice is correct or not. You know by yourself that the practice is making you happy, peaceful, solid. You know the teacher takes care of his practice and you take care of your practice and we should not look at it as a rule or a ritual, otherwise we are caught in forms of rituals and rules and the Buddha is against rituals, mere rituals and rules.

When you hold a glass of water and drink it mindfully, the act is so beautiful and it looks like a ritual, right? But the one who is holding the glass and drinking he does not have any

intention of making it into a ritual, a performance. He just enjoys holding the glass and drinking. But because mindfulness is there, very deep, very strong, so the act looks like a ritual, but it is not ritual, it is the practice.

When you bow like this and you feel that your mind and your body are coming together in concentration, in mindfulness and you feel that you are totally present and you are oriented to something good, true and beautiful, the nature of enlightenment, the nature of awakening in you, so you inherit, you profit from it and you don't think of it as a ritual. But if you do it like a machine and when you see someone and you just imitate them without understanding, that is a ritual, that is a ridiculous thing to do, entirely empty. That kind of ritual is entirely empty and we should not do it.

That is why in big retreats in North America we always have new people, sometimes 50 to 60 % of the people who join the retreat are new people and they are embarrassed, they think of it as a ritual, they are not comfortable. That is why I always begin by saying, to bow or not to bow that is not the question! And to bow that is a ritual, so don't be caught in a ritual. Practice. If you think that doing like this will bring you concentration, insight and reverence that makes you good, that makes you happy and then you do it and you are free from rituals, you are free from rules.

So the ten novice precepts are practices that aim at helping the novice to be free, to be happy, to be solid and if you consider the precepts as something that limits your freedom you are wrong, you are caught in rituals, you are caught in rules and that is against the Buddhist spirit. In the fifty one categories of mental formations there is one mental formation. It is described as a wholesome mental formation because there are unwholesome mental formations like anger, hatred, fear. They are not positive mental states but this mental formation is a good mental state. It can be translated as shame but it is very difficult to translate exactly. It means, you are ashamed of yourself when you realize that you don't practice as you should.

You don't need someone to tell you that you don't practice, you have got all the conditions for your success in the practice and yet you don't do it, and when you don't do it and every time you think of it you are ashamed. Please, help me to find the word in English. It means the same that happens when you confront another person. You see another person practicing, so well, so happy, so relieved and you feel ashamed in his or her presence.

If you are a Dharma teacher, or an apprentice Dharma teacher, or a future Dharma teacher you know that it would not be all right if you don't practice because you are sharing the Dharma. You are speaking in the name of the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas about the practice. You tell people to try to be mindful and to establish themselves in the here and the now and to touch the wonders of life in the here and now, to nourish themselves, to transform themselves and yet you don't do it, when you think of it, you have a sense of shame. That is a good mental formation, a wholesome mental formation because thanks to that mental formation you will change. You evolve, you become a better Dharma practitioner. That is why shame is the first of many wholesome formations.

People who don't have a sense of shame have no future. You should be ashamed of the fact that you don't practice when conditions favorable for the practice are all there within and around you. You have the teaching, you have got the instructions, you have got a place, you have got a house to live in, you have got food to eat, you have got brothers and sisters helping you, you have got a teacher, you have got every condition favorable for your practice and yet you don't practice. And every time you go back and see that situation and feel shameful that is a very good kind of energy that can transform you and make you into a better practitioner. All of us should be equipped by shame, that is a kind of cosmetic, a kind of adornment that every one needs. Adorn yourself with shame and then you will be a good teacher and then you will be a good student and then you will be a good Dharma teacher.

You have been given a chance to rake the leaves and you don't rake them as you should. You are given a chance to wash the dishes and yet you don't wash them as you should. You don't

enjoy the practice of washing the dishes. You are given a chance to walk from your room to the meditation hall and you don't do it. You walk and yet you allow yourself to get caught in your anger, in your despair, in the past, in the future and shame is something that can rescue you from the state of being stubborn in your practice. That is why the Buddha said, equip yourself with shame and then you will become a good practitioner, a Bodhisattva and that is why shame is the number one of the good mental formations.

And you need another person to tell you the truth, to stand in front of you in order to have shame because you are capable of having that mental formation. Every time we see another person in front of you and you feel ashamed that you cannot do like him or like his expectation of him and then you feel ashamed also.

Let us discuss about the student and the teacher relationship. Shame, plays a very important role. The teacher should be ashamed when he or she faces his disciple. He has to ask the question whether he is worthy of his disciple, his life, his practice, whether it is worthy of his disciple. Am I a worthy person in relationship with my disciple? And if the teacher does not have shame in him he is not a good teacher. He teaches things that he doesn't practice and the student also, when he faces his teacher he should have shame. The teacher has done his best in order to offer the teaching, to support him, to love him and yet he has not made use of this and become a good practitioner. He is ashamed every time he is in the presence of his teacher. So shame is helping both of them. Am I worthy of my teacher? Am I worthy of my disciple? That is the function of shame.

Now, let us talk about the relationship between big brother and younger brother, or big sister and younger sister in the Dharma. Because we all expect our brother or sister to practice, whether they are senior or junior. As a big sister we should be able to feel shame when we see a young sister practicing solidly, so well, and when you look at your sister in that way, with a sense of shame, you evolve, you become a better sister. And when you are a young sister and if you look at your big sister you know that your big sister is expecting you to practice well the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners. She has done everything she could in order to help you, to support you to practice and yet you revolt against her, you don't know how to deepen your practice and in a way you betray her, you are unkind to your big sister.

The same is true of the brothers. A big brother is someone who knows that since he has been in the Dharma longer than his younger brother his practice should be good enough in order to serve as a model or as a support for his younger brother and if he does not behave well, he does not practice well, every time he sees his younger brother, the sense of shame will help him to improve. And every time he sees his younger brother he has an opportunity to go back to the practice and do it much better. And the younger brother also should know that in order to be a good young brother he should get down to the practice and by practicing he is making his big brother happy and he can even help his big brother. His big brother may have more difficulties within himself and blaming him is not helpful. Practice better and then you help your big brother.

When the monks and the nuns see a lay person, because in Vietnam and in many other countries the lay people support the monks with shelter and food. Every day the monks have to go and beg for the food and the lay people expect the monks to practice. So, when we hold the bowl of food and we do the five contemplations, we visualize where the food has come from and we see the earth, the sky, the hard work of the lay person, the love, the support of the lay person, we are ashamed that we don't practice well and because of that sense of shame we know how to eat mindfully and eating mindfully is already a good response to the lay person. When a lay person comes to the temple that is a good opportunity for the monks and the nuns to reflect and to nourish his/her shame in order to become a good practitioner.

So every day we have a lot of opportunities to see each other and we can have an impact on each other with our practice. In the world, our professors teach but they don't necessarily have to do it, what they need is to deliver the teaching and they get paid for it. They teach what they have got in terms of knowledge, conceptual knowledge, but teaching the Dharma is different. Whether in a monastery or in a Buddhist institute you just don't give this conceptual teaching. You have to teach with your practice, with your experience. That is why a Buddhist institute should be organized in such a way that the practice should go together with the classroom.

Even if you are a young sister very new to the practice, even if you are a young brother still new to the practice, but if you practice well, if you know how to walk mindfully, how to rake the leaves mindfully. You are already a teacher even if you don't actually deliver a speech, because you embody the living teaching and the teacher is in the student and the student is in the teacher: interbeing. We have to recognize both in us. We have a teacher within and we also have a student within, at the same time, and that helps us to grow in the practice.

In fact, it is wonderful to have a place to be in, a place where conditions are favorable for the practice of transformation and healing. The earth, the sky, many living beings have come together to make the place available to us. The place has teachers, it has big brothers and sisters, the place has friends and supporters. We actually have every favorable condition for our practice and if we allow time to go by like that without getting down to the real practice we are being unkind to earth, sky, to teachers, to brothers, to sisters and to numerous living beings and we should be ashamed of that nature of unkindness in us and that is why we should wake each other up into that sense of shame so that everyone of us will be a better practitioner and we will be able to support each other in the practice.

When we are ordained as a lay person, upasika, upasaka, when we are ordained as a novice monk or nun we know that we are still new in the practice and should rely in our big brothers and sisters in the Dharma in order for our practice to take root. Sometimes our big Dharma brothers and our big Dharma sisters are still very young, much younger than us and we have the tendency to say that, well, they're just kids, they don't know much about life and they cannot really play the role of big brothers and big sisters for us. If you have the kind of thinking, you are wrong.

Many of us have realized that if we are ordained one day earlier we profit from that day. The earlier you get ordained the better because the day you ordain you have the opportunity to end, to realize, to recognize the habit energy. You want to shut the door behind you and you want just to go ahead and the process of transformation and healing can begin right away even if you don't know it.

Being in the Sangha as a member, as a full member and allowing the Sangha to embrace you, to protect you, to transform you is very important, whether you are a lay person or you are a monastic. You take refuge in the Sangha and even if you think that much has not been done or realized in you a lot is being done at the same time.

We have a sister who belongs to the generation of the Apple trees. She came from Canada, and after she went home and she thought that her practice was still very weak. She did not know the transformation that had taken place within her life and when she arrived at her home in Canada people looked at her with different eyes. They saw her peaceful, solid, smiling, fresh and she commands a lot of respect. The people who used to deal with her as a kid now began to deal with her with a lot of respect. She was so surprised to see how much people suffer! How much people suffer in her family, in her greater family, in her former environment in Canada. Two years ago it was the same but she didn't know it, didn't see it and now after twenty two months of practicing as a nun she went back and recognized all their suffering and at the same time they look at her and see how transformed she is just after twenty two months of being a nun. During that time she didn't think she had made a big progress at all. She just allowed herself to be in the Sangha, embraced by the Sangha,

transported by the Sangha and the transformation just takes place slowly, like that. She has transformed but she didn't know it. She met a lady who suffered very much because of her situation and her husband and that lady used to look at her as a little girl but now that lady saw her and she was deeply inspired and she wanted to leave everything in order to become a nun. When her husband learned about it he was furious. He considered the young nun as his enemy who was about to take away his wife. Two years ago he used to look at her as a kid, as a little girl, but how could a little girl have such an impact on his wife? How could a kid have such an impact on a person like his wife? He had tried his best and he had not had any impact on his wife yet. In that state of anger he came to see her and she was smiling and inviting him to come to Plum Village, both of them.

It is not the amount of experience in society that counts, it is not the amount of knowledge that we have got in school that counts, it is the amount of training that you have to consider. So a very young sister, a very young brother that has entered the monastic life before you, you have to really look at her as your big sisters, to look at him as your big brother and the notion of seniorship in the Dharma is very important. So, even if you are sixty and you just received the novice precepts you have to look upon the sixteen year old novice as your big brother or big sister. This is a good training. That is why every Sunday we sit in order of ordination in order to remind people that this is the practice of seniority, a long tradition of Buddhist practice. We learn the spirit of democracy, we try to encourage everyone to express himself/herself concerning how to make the life of the community happier, better organized. We encourage those who are reluctant to express themselves, we try to train them for them to be ready to contribute their insight. We learn to listen to everyone in the Sangha so that everyone can have a chance to express themselves, that is our learning about the spirit of democracy.

Another practice is deep listening, patience, and also encouraging speech but we still practice the spirit of seniorship because even if those monks and nuns are young they have been there longer in the practice and we should try to remember they are our big brothers in the Dharma, they are our big sisters in the Dharma and this is very helpful. Not to them, but to us. The younger brothers, the younger sisters in the Dharma we have to consult them because in them there is the presence of long time-wisdom transmitted by many generations of teachers. And you will be surprised to see that even if the novice is still young you can learn a lot from him or from her. And even if you compare your practice with his or hers you will see that your steps may not be as solid as hers, your breath may not be as mindful as his and out of that you have a kind of authentic respect because that respect is not for her, as a young novice, but it is for the Buddha because the young novice is the continuation of the Buddha. And you can see your teacher in the young novice because in every cell of her body, of his body there is the presence of the teacher in it.

In the Hermitage something just happened in the last two weeks. It makes me think very deeply. I have several pots of chrysanthemums in my veranda and among them there is a pot of white, pure white chrysanthemums, about twenty big chrysanthemums. I have been taking good care of that pot of chrysanthemums, I put in my veranda about eight pots of chrysanthemums. The veranda is made of glass and the sun rises from this direction and the sun is setting in this direction. The pot of white chrysanthemums I put here and next to it is a pot of cyclamen, what is the word in English for cyclamen? Of violet flowers. And over here, another pot of chrysanthemums, violet, about two or three big flowers like this, as big as this pot and this second cyclamen is also violet. And this is pure white. And for my chrysanthemums I don't have to water from the top, because under each pot I have a container like this. I just pour the water and the roots over here naturally absorb the water. I do that every two days and they know the about of water they can absorb every day.

My door is here, I enter here from the Hermitage and I can enter here from the front yard and I observe and I have a hammock hung in here. You know everything now (laughter). Usually I sit in the hammock, I look and enjoy all the flowers in this direction but one day I sit and I look here and I saw that the white chrysanthemums are becoming violet. The fact is that the violet colors reflected into the glass and the setting sun is sending rays in this direction and this is receiving the sunshine. If you come to the Hermitage now you will see that the ten or twelve big chrysanthemums on this side have become half violet and the ten on this side are pure white.

The sixteen new novices can come and look. It is amazing! It is very beautiful! You don't have to do anything, just allow yourself to be in the Sangha. If you have trust you allow the Sangha to embrace you, to transport you in its spirit and energy and you will be transformed. So trust is very important, you have to believe, you have to have confidence. We all know that members of our Sangha are not perfect, nothing is perfect in this world, but the Sangha is important. I told you some time ago that last fall I went to Omega Institute and during walking meditation I saw a beautiful branch of autumn leaves, so beautiful, so harmonious. I came close and I saw that the leaves were not perfect. All the leaves were perforated a little bit because of the insects or because of the fungi, but if you look at the branch they are so beautiful because of the harmony in it. So the Sangha is like that. Members of the Sangha may not be perfect but if we learn how to live in the Sangha with harmony and trust, each one in his/her position, that Sangha can perform a miracle, everyone who comes and touches the Sangha can be transformed.

The environment can have a very strong impact on the genetics, the culture of spirituality is transforming the cells in our body, the genes in our body. It is true! When you look at the white chrysanthemums becoming violet you see the wonders of life, you see the impact of culture and spirituality on the genetic heritage of mankind. So the Buddha has transmitted to us many genes, many elements of the spirituality of culture that will continue to have a deep impact on our lives. We have to be able to allow these elements to penetrate for our transformation and for our healing and the Sangha is the agent. The Sangha represents the Buddha, the Sangha practicing always the career of the Buddha and the Dharma, so having trust in the Sangha it is very important because the Sangha is the Buddha. And I have said several times that the next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and each one of us can be a cell of that body, that Buddhakaya, that Buddha body.

We should give up what we consider to be our knowledge, our experience, because that knowledge has not helped very much. That experience has not helped very much, we still suffer a lot that is why we should be ready to give up in order to be free for the penetration of the Dharma, of the Sangha, of the Buddha to become possible and taking refuge in the Sangha, trust in the Sangha, allow the Sangha to transport you, to carry you. It is a comfortable feeling, a comfortable practice. And taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith: it is our daily practice.

Questions & Answers

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 9, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 9th of December 1999, we are in the Lower Hamlet and it is time for us to ask questions concerning the Dharma talks that have been given in the last few weeks. You may ask in French, or in English or in Vietnamese. Let us take advantage of it.

Q: When I was in high school I took a psychology class and my psychology teacher was a behaviorist. And one aspect of the behaviorist school that he talked about was the idea that... he liked to explain that we didn't have any free will, and that everything that happened to us was determined by our outside environment, sort of predestination in way, one domino falls and the rest of everything comes into place. My question is, I am wondering if Buddhism supports that notion because the idea of emptiness and interbeing seem to point in that direction for me, I am not sure. In your commentary on the Prajnaparamita sutra you talked about how we are empty because we are full of everything else, and that basically was what interbeing was, in a sense. So what I am wondering is, is there free will that makes the determination between which paths we take, and if there is a free will how is that reconciled with the idea of emptiness? Because if there is something that is inside that is screening, the outside environment it seems like not only am I a product of everything else that is outside but there is also something that is inside that is propelling something that I consider myself forward. To put it in the most basic terms, are emptiness and free will mutually exclusive?

A: Emptiness is made of free will and free will of emptiness. And that is the meaning of emptiness. It is like the right is made of the left, the left is made of the right and if you want to say that only one exists there is not emptiness. So you can answer the question of free will by yourself, with your direct experience of emptiness because we should live the insight of emptiness and not just talk about it. When you come to Plum Village you are given an opportunity to practice mindfulness, you are given equal opportunity. Like when you walk you can choose to walk in mindfulness, when you wash the dishes you may like to wash in mindfulness, and then there are brothers and sisters who are doing the same. So you have many opportunities to put into practice the teaching of mindful living. When you walk with mindfulness you become free and freedom is something that you can experience. Because you can walk as a slave being caught by the past, by the future, by your anger, by your afflictions but you can go back to your in breath, out breath and walk as a free person.

So freedom is a reality, not just a notion and it is a function of your practice and there are those of us who practice better than others and this alone proves that free will is possible. In the light of the practice this seems to be the only kind of freedom that we can get and if we know how to inherit, to make use of this freedom you will have a larger freedom which will be the fruit of this practice of freedom. Looking back at yourself, you know that to be free or not to be free depends on you to a large extent. So, go back to your breath and breathing in liberate yourself. This is something that we can do at any time of the day and we don't have to be caught in the speculation about whether freedom exists or not because we know very well that slavery is a reality but also freedom is a reality and that is the meaning of our getting together and leaning on each other for the practice.

Q: Je ne voudrais surtout pas paraître prétentieux, mais il me semble que ce que nous lisons, ce que nous entendons, ait une connotation un peu pessimiste parce qu'il est question du manas 6-1 et 2, les deux fonctions du manas que vous avez noté 6-1/6-2, mais le paragraphe 6-2 ne parle que de manas passionné, j'ai entendu et j'ai lu d'autre part cette stance qui est affichée aussi dans différents mots, vivant dans le monde sans être affecté par les afflictions du monde, toute souffrance teinte, le bodhisattva passe magistrement sur les vagues de la naissance et de la mort. 頻 Je pense que l'il conviendrait, la lumière de ce que nous avons lu

ce matin, de lire: vivant dans le monde sans être affecté par les afflictions du monde, toute passion teinte, parce que les souffrances sont les fruits de la passion. N'est-il pas possible alors de penser que ce paragraphe 6-2 c'est dire le manas passionné, qui par la pratique du bodhisattva, la pratique assidue, continue, efficace du bodhisattva va perdre ses quatre passions, sans cela il y aurait on pourrait imaginer peut-être un paragraphe 6-3 qu'on pourrait imaginer, permettez-moi de le lire ■ : 6-3 est le manas de fonctionnement du bodhisattva qui a teint les quatre passions. Il serait le support des connaissances obtenues par la vue juste, le support des actions justes, des pensées justes, des perceptions justes ce qui fait que la vue sur le moi serait teinte. Mais le bodhisattva qui vit dans le monde a besoin du manas pour couter, pour sentir, pour goûter, pour marcher, pour dormir. Est-ce que cette vue serait correcte?

A: Manas is a kind of perception characterized by misunderstanding, by ignorance and therefore based on manas in order to act, to speak and to think you make a lot of mistakes and that is why the bodhisattva in the process of her practice learns to act, to think and to speak on the basis of wisdom, the wisdom of non discrimination, the wisdom that reveals that there is no separated self. So it is perfectly possible for anyone to continue acting and helping and serving without manas, because without manas you have something much better, that is the wisdom of non discrimination (Sanskrit) and that is to replace manas. That does not mean that you have to throw manas away in order to have non discriminative wisdom because it is manas that will be transformed into the wisdom of non discrimination. When you have a cup of water that is not drinkable and you throw it away and then you have no water at all you have to seek ways to transform that water into something that you can drink. That what it means by transformation so if you are in a desert and if you are dying of thirst and then if you have a glass of muddy water you should not throw it away, you have to keep it and transform it into drinkable water. So manas within yourself, there is wisdom in it, so the fact is not throwing away something but to transform it.

The other day Jacques also presented a question in a written form, he said, because I was drawing that circle representing alaya serving as the cause for all defiled Dharma, this is effect and this is the base for this manifestation, but when we look deeply into this manifestation we can also see the base in it and that is why I propose to wipe away the outer circle because the outer circle can be seen already in the inner circle. So his question is, if this is defiled Dharmas and then where can we get the purity of the Tathagatha, the ground of enlightenment? so this half moon should be retained in order to provide us with our opportunity for enlightenment and purification and so on. So he did not feel comfortable when I wiped this out. This is a very typical kind of question, very typical kind of thinking based on dualism, because when you think of something as defiled, as negative, you immediately want to throw it away. And that is a strong tendency in many people and now we must learn how to think in a non dualistic way, it is defiled, it is negative, but you have to keep it and transform it because out of it there is nothing else. It is like the glass of muddy water, if you throw it out you don't have water, you have to transform.

So all the defiled Dharmas, all the negative things contain within themselves the positive ground, the ground of enlightenment. That is why it was so clear that in the beginning you recognize as e but a little later you recognize that c is in e. And if c is in e already, why do you have to keep c outside the e, so the practice is how to learn to think, to speak, and to see things in non-dual terms. Because the other day Thay already talked about the top soil and that if we looked deeply into the top soil we see the green leaves and if we look deeply into the green leaves we can see the top soil in it. Because without the top soil there would be no green leaves and if there are no green leaves there is no top soil, so they contain each other -

that is inter containing, interbeing, that is an art of being, an art of talking and we have to get used to it. Ca va, Jacques, cœst clair? Another question? OK.

Q: Dear Thay, because the alaya is everywhere and there is non duality, and in the leaf you can see the soil. I can recognize an enlightened being, I can maybe see him, he is part of me somehow, how come he cannot enlighten me. Everything has to come from me and how come there is no interaction possible on this if I am part of everything and everything is part of me. How come?

A: When you look deeply you will be able to remove the notion of inside and outside and the discrimination between you and him, you and her will be removed because the inside contains the outside and etc. I would like to bring you a very concrete example. You are a member of the Sangha living in the Sangha. You are a monastic or a lay person living in the Sangha. You may have the impression that your Sangha does not support you enough. The Sangha does not care about you, and you believe that until the Sangha comes and supports you and takes care of you, you will not be able to make progress in the practice. Sometime a monastic will think like that. Sometime a lay person will think like that. She or he will wait for an act, an attitude from the Sangha, from the Teacher in order for her/him to do all right. Right? But at the same time that person knows that the Sangha is within him/her, and if that person knows how to take care of the Sangha, and the Teacher in him/her she will be doing all right, there is no inside or outside and discrimination and blaming will cease to exist.

We have been in Plum Village some twenty years and every time I practice walking meditation I always pay attention to the trees that we have planted. Many of the pine trees have been planted on the first or second year of Plum Village and I use to stop and look at the cedar and the pine tree and smile to them. I tend to look at them as practitioners, a monk, a nun or a lay person and I say: this novice is sixteen years old and is doing very well and I touch the branch of the pine and I smile at the pine. I noticed that when you are planted as a small tree it is very easy for you. Taking roots in the soil is much easier than if you are planted as a big tree. You know, in the Upper Hamlet there were five or six pines that belonged to the category called umbrella pine and we took them home one day, quite big, about three meters. And it was more difficult to take care than when you plant small pines. I remember we had difficulties the first year, the second and the third year because there was a lot of wind in the Upper Hamlet, and we did not try to help the pines to stand firm against the wind. That is why every winter the pine would go like this and then the soil is very wet, very soft and the wind is capable of making the pine incline like this. So when the rain stopped we used the tractor to pull it back to the upright position. And during two or three years we did like that, and that is why this pine was not doing very well in the first three years.

That is why when we planted the three big cedars we tried our best, and asked a professional to help us pin it down with three very solid sticks. That is why after the second year we could take out the sticks and the cedars became very strong.

It is the same thing with a practitioner, if you allow yourself to be blown by the wind. If your practice is off and on – you stay for a few months and then you leave, and then you come back for a few months and you leave, it is like allowing the wind to upset you, to make you lose your stability, your solidity. And the condition of non-interruption is not here for you to grow as a good practitioner. You may have the impression that the teacher does not support you that the sangha does not support you. The tree may think that the soil is not kind to it, but the soil is always there supporting all the trees, with a non-discriminative attitude. The soil provides the tree with the basic conditions, opening herself up to receive the tree, embrace the tree. But if the tree does not try to get rooted as soon as possible, then the soil cannot do anything. So to cultivate solidity, to cultivate breathing, to cultivate taking refuge in the sangha is your practice. If you go back and take advantage of the soil in you, take advantage

of the sangha in you then the rooting will take place, and if the rooting takes place you'll be a very beautiful tree.

If you do not allow yourself to be rooted in the Sangha, if you don't allow the Sangha to be rooted in you your practice will not bring you anywhere at all. So even if you do not practice a lot of walking meditation, or sitting meditation, or chanting, even if you don't learn a lot of scriptures. But you just spend your time with your brothers and sisters in an intelligent way so that your sisters and brothers are rooted in you and you are rooted in your sisters and brothers you are doing it right. And one week, two weeks is enough to let you know that you have made progress, so we should not say that spending time with your brothers and sisters is a waste of time, no. Your time is to do that, your time is to do that, to get rooted in the Sangha and to allow the Sangha to be rooted in yourself, this is very important. That was the practice of the Buddha, that was the practice of the monks and the nuns at the time of the Buddha. So if your practice does not give you that kind of rooting you should know that practice is not very helpful. Even drinking tea together, or washing the dishes together, or working in the garden together. All these things can be considered to be right practice because they help you to be rooted, it helps the Sangha to be rooted in you. And with the insight of interbeing, it means the insight of non discrimination, you see that the outside is the inside and the inside is the outside. You can think that the soil is always trying to help, the sun is always trying to help, but if the tree does not try its best to root in the soil and profit from the sunshine, the sunshine cannot do anything, the soil cannot do anything. I hope my answer was helpful to you. Happy Rooting! That is our wish! Commenta se traduit em francais? Enracinement heureux!

Q: Dear Thay, from your teaching I learned that the alaya, the ground of everything, is not an immobile thing, it is a kind of floating stream. When I pass away what will be the interplay between my manovijnana(store consciousness), my manas, and my citta(mind consciousness)? Thank you.

A: Can you wait? (laughter)

Q: Yes, I can wait! (laughter)

A: I think it is very important to know that you are passing away right this moment. Life and death are taking place right now, right here and life and death as you see it are only complementary things, things that make each other possible because dying makes the living possible. It is very important to learn to look deeply so that you may see that in this very moment you are dying and you are being reborn. It is very important. And this is by practicing every day and this will bring you another way of looking. In the Tibetan tradition, you know, when the Teacher passes away you have to wait for a few years and you go look for a little boy, may be a little girl and to recognize your Teachers continuation in that little boy or little girl. And in the Tibetan tradition you may practice some kind of testing to know if that little boy is a reincarnation of your teacher or not. So you bring a number of things that have been used by your Teacher in his lifetime and then you bring together other things and you allow the little boy to pick up one of the things and if he picks up the right things you are sure that he is a continuation of your former Teacher. I like that very much, it is very poetic, very charming practice and idea.

But I always tell my students that they don't need to wait until I pass away in order to look for that little boy or little girl, they have to do it now because I have already been reborn, in this very moment, not only as a little boy but as many little boys, not as a little girl, but as many little girls at the same time. I myself recognize them, not all of them, but some of them. And there are continuations that I have not actually seen with my eyes but I know they are there. So I see the fact that I am dying every moment and I am being reborn every moment and I feel good about it because I don't see myself as being limited in this body. Not only in this body, not only in the body that will appear after I pass away, but in many bodies at this very

time. Again about the rooting: when I have a disciple practicing well I see myself rooting in him/her and I see him rooting in me. And when the disciple is rooted in me he has a lot, he is in touch with all generations of ancestors, he feels that he is very solid, he has a background that is so solid, many, many generations of teachers are in him as supporters.

So my disciples have lots of advantages when they take root in me. And I get a lot also when I am rooted in him/her because when I see that I am rooted in him/her I feel that I have the future, whole future for me. I feel young, I feel very young, I feel that I am just born, I am being born every moment so the insight of non discrimination, the insight of non interruption is there and that makes me not afraid of death. For I know it cannot do anything to us, death cannot disrupt anything, because even right now the continuation has taken place in many, many forms. And if you look at the Buddha you see that the Buddha is there today in every one of us. The Buddha has a life called the life of wisdom. The mindfulness of the Buddha is his body and his wisdom is his life. If we touch ourselves deeply we see that the body and the life of the Buddha continue today and tomorrow. We can touch the Buddha right here and right now. And later on when you learn more about alayavijnana, you see that alayavijnana it is not only an individual thing it is a collective thing as well. And you will have another notion of alaya that will be closer to reality; that is why I said, can you wait? Further on you will see the teaching on alayavijnana.

Q: Speaking of passing away, my father passed away two weeks ago today, and he died with a lot of anger towards my mother. They are divorced. I think he had a lot of anger in general, my mother just happened to be a particular focus. Looking deeply through the practice I see that I am my father and so I have my fathers anger. And so it is my task to transform that anger for him, for myself, for my wife, for all of us, I wonder if you can offer some words of encouragement. Thank you.

A: You have enough wisdom to start the practice. It is very important to see that your father is always there within yourself and every step you make is for your father, and for his father, and the father of his father also. Every breath taken in mindfulness, every step taken in mindfulness, every smile you can produce is for all of them, so that transformation can take place in every moment. I also practice like that. The time when I practice lying down in a most comfortable way, not doing anything at all, completely at rest, I say: Daddy, let us stay in this position, let us breath and enjoy it. We don't have much to do. You can see your father responding to you in yourself and he has a chance now to stop, to relax, and not to do too much like he used to do. Sometimes I say: Mummy, let us sit still and not worry about anything, we have a chance. Sometimes I practice with my Teacher, I practice with the Buddha. It is wonderful to be aware that everyone is practicing with you because you contain a multitude. You are large, you contain multitudes. When I make steps like this you can visualize that all generations of my ancestors are taking steps with me. The amount of freedom I enjoy and the amount of stopping I enjoy is being shared by all of them. It is wonderful! Transformation and healing is possible every moment. It is very nice to practice for your father, for your mother, and for their father for their mother also. That is why to me it is a great happiness to be able to encounter the Dharma, and when you encounter the Sangha you have an opportunity to encounter the Dharma and the Dharma can change everything. And when you are changed, when you are transformed you become an instrument for change and transformation for many living beings. If you have that kind of desire, if you are motivated by that desire to help, to change you are already a bodhisattva, the energy of the Buddha. You are so alive because you are inhabited by the kind of motivation, that kind of desire. And being with the Sangha, allow yourself to be transported by the Sangha, allowing the Sangha to be rooted in you is a very important practice. Every one of us needs that practice, They needs that practice, he needs to be rooted deeply in the Sangha, and he needs

the Sangha to be deeply rooted in him, because his happiness has been made of it and will be made of it.

This morning I was practicing walking meditation in the Hermitage and I thought that it was so wonderful that as an animal we have had the opportunity to stand upright on our feet and liberate completely our hands. When we were still chimpanzees we had to walk with our hands. At that time we were able already to use our hands, we could use a stone in order to crush the nut we wanted to eat, we were able to use a stick in order to get the things that are a little bit further, but chimps they had to use their arms a lot in order to walk. But three million and one half years ago we were able to stand up and completely liberate our arms. We did not use our arms for walking any more, and beginning at that time we began to evolve. With our two arms two hands totally free we can do so many things and our fingers grew and we got a lot of capacity with our two hands. The skillfulness of our hands has helped our brain to develop in a very, very quick way. It took only three million and five hundred thousand years in order for our brain to be three times bigger. Three and one half million years seems to be long but in terms of evolution it is nothing.

At the time we stood up, homo-erectus, that is the name, and as our brain began to develop we continued to get knowledge, we became homo-sapiens and since our brain has doubled and trebled, it needs a lot more oxygen, a lot more sugar. We know that the brain takes up at least 1/5 of the nutrition from our eating because we spend a lot of energy for our brain. Oxygen, glucose and other things. With the presence of the Buddha, and the people who know how to cultivate mindfulness, we become a kind of species called homo-conscious.

We are capable of walking like this and being aware of every step we make. The chimps did not know how to do it, they walk because they want to get something to eat over there. They could never be aware of the step they make. Now I am capable of being in the here and the now and focusing one hundred per cent of my attention to the fact of walking like this, I become free, it is wonderful. And suddenly the Kingdom of God, suddenly the Buddha Land, is available to me because I am conscious. Economically speaking, a step made like this is not very productive, but spiritually speaking it is very rewarding and brings you a lot of happiness. And in terms of evolution this is a wonderful manifestation. It is not that in the chimps there is no alayavijnana, but that in that manifestation conditions are not sufficient for that kind of delight, that kind of penetration, that kind of enlightenment to be expressed. It is already there, but it needs more conditions, so the fact that we are able to stand up and free our hands, the fact that our brains have trebled, the fact that there is a Teacher to tell us how to breathe in and breathe out mindfully and touch the ground with mindfulness. It is wonderful, we belong to a race, the third one, and if we continue to walk like that, the process of evolution will continue.

You know, the way we manage our fingers has made a great impact on our intelligence, on the development of our mind. In Buddhism we see that there are many positions of the hand called mudras. When the Buddha gave a Dharma talk he used this mudra: the first truth, the second truth, the third truth and by using his hands like this his ideas become clearer, his insight deeper. So our hand is an extension of our brain. It is our hands that have nourished our brain, have helped our brain to develop and they inter are. Our intelligence helped our hands to adapt. Look at the baby learning how to grasp things. By using our hands we know that our hands are an extension of our brains, and if we have an instrument like a stick or a stone, the stick and the stone become an extension of our mind. Now we have the computer. The computer is an extension of our hand and of our mind too. That is evolution.

The same thing will happen to our feet, because our feet were used only to help us move from one place to another. But now we have another function for our feet, not just getting there but just walking for the sake of walking only. This function is very important, touching the Kingdom of God, touching Nirvana, touching the Buddha Land, you need your feet in order

to do that. If you use your feet like that, you know that in your former times when you were a chimp you didn't do it. So it is wonderful just to walk and to focus your mindfulness on the fact that you are using your feet to touch the realm of enlightenment. The Kingdom of God, the Pure Land can bring you a lot of happiness, a lot of pleasure and the wonderful thing is that you can do it today. You can touch the Kingdom of God today, you can touch the Buddha Land today, you can touch the depths of yourself today just moving your feet. Those kind of feet are biologically possible, those kind of feet are spiritually possible, because the Buddha feet have been transmitted to you. You now know how to walk mindfully and enjoy every step you make. Do use your Buddha feet otherwise you would not be very different from a chimpanzee.

Living in the Spirit of Non-self

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on December 16, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear Friends, today is the 16th December, 99 and we are in the New Hamlet. We know how important it is to practice taking Refuge in the Sangha. In order to have a Sangha we should learn how to build one and the best way to build one is to learn to live in harmony with the Sangha in the spirit of non self. So building a Sangha also means living with the Sangha. If you are lucky to be born in a family where everyone considers themselves as practitioners, Buddhist practitioners, you may like to transform your family into a small Sangha, practicing with Buddhist terminology and so on. But if you do not have the fortune of being born in a family where everyone accepts the way of life of Buddhism, then you may like to build a Sangha also, but not with Buddhist terminology, rituals and so on. It is possible to convince everyone to adapt to art of mindful living. To me, all Buddhist terms can be translated into non-Buddhist terms. We have been very successful in doing so. When you study the Five Mindfulness Trainings you don't see the words Buddha, Dharma, Sangha in it and the Five Mindfulness Trainings are in plain, secular language.

When you say, I take Refuge in the Buddha, it sounds Buddhist. But if you say, I have confidence in my capacity of being mindful, of being awake. I trust in my capacity of being there, in the here and the now. I trust my capacity of being understanding and compassionate. That is the equivalent of, 'I take Refuge in the Buddha', I trust Buddhahood in me, I trust my capacity of waking up, of being able to live in the here and the now. So it is entirely possible for you to use non-Buddhist language in order to express the insight and the practice of Buddhism. So even if your son, your daughter, does not like Buddhism you can still offer them the art of mindful living. That can bring a lot of happiness to you and to your family, transforming your family into a Sangha. You don't call it a Sangha, just a family, where everyone knows how to live in such a way that communication is possible, joy and peace become possible.

The people in the Lower Hamlet or in the New Hamlet may have noticed the way the monastics, the nuns, here take care of the subas who came from Vietnam. Some of you may think that they give too much care to the subas but that is their practice in the tradition. We take care of our senior teachers in such a way because that is not only taking care of them but taking care of ourselves. And when you take care of your teacher that way, your senior teachers that way, you have an opportunity to express your love and appreciation and yet you get a lot. Maybe the people who are being taken care of don't get as much as you do because by doing so you show your compassion, your appreciation, your love, your care and it is you who profits the most from your act. And so happiness is not an individual matter. You make the other person happy and then happiness will return to you, like this, right away.

Suppose you go home and take care of your mother the way the nuns here take care of the superior nuns. Not as a duty, but as something you like to do. You know you are a continuation of your mother and you would like to take care of your mother inside of you and around you. Just take care like that, and that is not a loss of time; that is not losing your time, your time is to do that. Expressing love in concrete terms, and then you see that you are the person who is happy because you have the insight that your mother is you. You are just the continuation of your mother and making your mother happy it means making yourself happy. So I don't think that nuns in the New Hamlet are thinking that is a duty they have to do because the subas have come from Vietnam and they have to treat them with utmost care. That is just their tradition, the practice, and when you practice like that you are happy. And why don't we do that with our father, our mother, senior members of our family. If we take

care of them like that, they will see that you are them and they are you, non-discrimination, and suddenly your family becomes a Sangha because we have to remember always that happiness is not an individual thing.

And that we can see in many things, as we observe in our body there are so many cells! The cells in our body operate not on the base of duty but they just enjoy operating like that. The lungs are doing their best in order to renew the blood. With the intake of oxygen they do not say, "You the blood, you need me in order to be red again, to be oxygenated again, and you have to be thankful to me." Lungs never think like that! It is their pleasure to breathe in and breathe out and offer oxygen to the blood cells. And the blood cells, they go back to the other cells and they release the oxygen and they release their nutriments, and they don't say, "Well we traveled a lot in the body in order to bring you oxygen and you should be grateful to me! I have done too much, now it is time for me to retire." The blood cells don't think like that, they just enjoy doing that. There is no discrimination at all in our body and we see that the insight of non-self, the insight of interbeing can be seen just by observing how the cells in our body operate. If you are a scientist observing the way the human body operates, you can see very well that everything is operating on the insight of non-self, non-discrimination and that every cell of your body has the wisdom of non-discrimination.

When you observe a beehive, you see the same thing. You don't see a chief, a boss directing things. You be number one and you do this for me, and you be number two and you have to go in that direction and get that pollen for me. There is no chief at all, there is no director. The queen bee is not a director, she is not the king, she is not really the queen, her duty is just to offer the eggs for the next generation of bees, she is not really a directress. And yet in the beehive every bee behaves perfectly and they don't have to tell each other how they do it. The way they live their daily lives, the way they live, the way they act is their message, and they continue to communicate by the way they are and the way they do things. Sometimes a bee will go back to the beehive and begin to dance. That is their own way of expressing to the other bees, indicating the direction where they can get more pollen - the dance of the bees.

Also, if you observe the termites, you see that they are wonderful. They always work as a team, they don't have a director either and the queen of the termites also has only one duty; to produce eggs for the next generation of termites. They are very talented workers. They even create air conditioners in the place where they live. They are organized perfectly and there is a lot of intelligence, a lot of wisdom in the way the bees and the termites organize their community. No-one gives any orders at all and communications go very well.

Termites do communicate with each other and bees also communicate very well with each other. Scientists notice that there are chemicals that radiate from each individual termite as means of communications. Not only chemicals, but the way termites move around and perform an act is considered to be a means of communication. And all other termites, all other bees are open to receive this kind of information and they just act, responding in a perfect way. No one needs to tell the other one you should behave like this or like that. There's harmony that you can see among the termites and among the bees, and scientists who observe them marvel at the way they operate. And now there's a science called neuroscience, they study the brain and the neuroscientists have discovered very much the same thing. There is no self, there is no chief, there is no director operating in the brain, there is only individual brain cells called neurons. When scientists look deeply into the way neurons act, they see that neurons communicate with each other very well. The individual neuron is linked to all other neurons in the brain so that communication can happen all the time and neurons are responding to each other in a very harmonious way and they don't need a director, they don't need a boss telling them what to do.

So, if you want to build a good Sangha, an ideal Sangha we just observe our body, we just observe the termites, we just observe the bees, we just observe the neurons and we know the best way to do it.

One of the attendants of the senior nuns reported to Thay that one day there were a team of two attendants and one sister is five or six years older than the other. The young attendant just looked at her big sisters and observed her and suddenly she knew what to do and what not to do because maybe there is more than one thing to do at the same time in order to make the senior nuns happy. So just observing, allow yourself to be in the place, to be penetrated by the information and then you naturally know what to do in order to complete the other's actions. And you don't need the other to tell you what to do, you just know what needs to be done at this moment and then the two attendants without any communication act together as a team. No one giving orders to the other, and the situation becomes perfect. No words needed, no order needed, just be there and become one with the whole situation and you know what to do and what not to do for harmony to reign. It is very interesting. There is no thinking needed, no pre-arrangement needed, no preparation needed, you just allow yourself to be there, to be mindful of the situation and then naturally you know what to do and what not to do to make the senior nuns happy and to make you happy also. It is like a piece of music, like a symphony, without a conductor.

The human brain is the most sophisticated thing that we can observe. There are so many neurons in it, billions of them, and yet harmony reigns in the brain. Suppose you are a New Yorker and you live with ten million other New Yorkers and you want to have a connection with all the other New Yorkers. Suppose you provide yourself with ten million strings and you tie one string onto yourself and one string to another New Yorker, and you do like that ten million times in order for you to be connected to all other New Yorkers. And each New Yorker will do the same thing like you. Each New Yorker will have ten million strings in order to be connected with other New Yorkers. Let us suppose that New York is ten times bigger, that is the situation of the brain, one neuron is in communication with all the other neurons. The neurons have impulses in them, they want to express, they want to communicate, they want to do something. And in every individual cell of the brain there is a kind of impulse, they fire electric impulses from themselves and all the other cells of the brain receive them. The neuroscientists have measured that the speed of these electrical impulses fired by each neuron is 400 km an hour and in one fraction of one second they fire again. Communication is permanent and all the other neurons receive the information permanently. In one second there are several times when electrical impulses are fired from one neuron to another or other neurons and that is why communication is always going on.

In a Sangha, if we want the communication to continue we should open ourselves. We should learn the art of communication. We communicate by the way we walk, the way we wish dishes, the way we look at our brother or sister. We can communicate in many ways, we don't have to use chemicals, like the termites, because our thought, our body and our speech they are energies, they are equivalent to chemicals because chemicals they are energy anyway. So every thought we have in our minds can be expressed in our way of looking, in our way of acting, so we communicate always. If the communication does not reach you it is because you are blocked somehow. Your practice is to unblock yourself for the communication of the members of the Sangha to reach you.

The scientists have tried many ways to understand the way the brain would operate. Suppose they play music, they play Beethoven and then they observe how the cells in the brain respond to the rhythm and to the music. Every note. They observe that zones in the brain suddenly light up and on the other side, another area of the brain lights up and there is a continuation of oscillation, back and forth like that. They operate exactly like a symphony and without any conductor. And one moment of music, one note, comes together like this. And you don't see anything, there is nothing organized that you can see. So it becomes very

organized, expressing like that and suddenly it is completely unglued, dissolves, you don't see anything and the next moment it comes up like this and total harmony will be seen again.

One of the four conditions we have learned, the previous moment of consciousness has opened the way for the next moment of consciousness and the base is always there in order to hold everything. It is perfectly organized in harmony and suddenly there is nothing, everything is disorganized and yet the next moment it will be reorganized in a perfect way again, and in the meantime alaya vijnana is holding all the seeds. If the first moment of consciousness has not happened, how could the second moment of consciousness take this? One moment of manifestation, one moment of emanation, today they like the word emanation, they don't use the word manifestation, emanation is the same thing: everything is an emanation of alaya vijnana, store consciousness.

So there must be a base, the root consciousness from which elements will come together in a very, very natural way, without any conductor, any self, expressing like that and then dissolving like that as if there were no organization at all. And again, it comes up, manifested again and scientists see very clearly that there is no self in the brain, no conductor, and they witness to the fact, to the insight of no self in the brain, there is no self. And scientists today say, what we can do to help you, my Buddhists friends, is to put a stamp on the teaching of non-self because science has proven that there is no self. We cannot do more than that, they said.

That is true because so many of them have witnessed to the insight, to the truth of no self. Our scientists, neuroscientists and even psychologists and sociologists they have all discovered the truth of non self. They can write, they can speak, they can testify to the truth of non self but they are still unable to live up to the truth of non self. So after having got out of their lab they go home and continue to live as their self, and they behave with their families and with their friends as if they had not see the truth of non self.

That is happening in the last years of the twentieth century. It is happening right now that scientists have discovered the truth of non self, of interbeing, of the nature of interconnectedness. They can testify to that truth, but they are not able to live that truth yet because they have not found ways in order to implement that insight into their daily life.

Many of us in the Buddhist Institute we do the same: we come to the classroom, we listen to our teacher about non self and interconnectedness. We believe, we have faith, in that teaching and yet when we go back to our brothers and sisters we don't apply very much the insight of non self. We get angry, we still get jealous and so on. We are not capable of behaving like the bees or the termites or the neurons or the cells in the body and our practice is to rely on the Sangha in order to be able to do so. Sangha building relies on us and in order to be a good Sangha builder we should see the truth of non self. We should see the truth of interbeing and we should come together to find ways in order to implement the insight of non self and impermanence in our way of doing things in the Sangha. And that is what we have been trying to do, that makes us different from the scientists.

We are not satisfied with the insight of non self, we want to live the insight of non self, that is why when we organize a retreat, we organize in such a way that everyone of us behaves like a bee. We don't need a director, we don't want to be ordered about. If we don't want to be ordered about, the only alternative is to open ourselves to see what is really going on, so that we would know what to do and what not to do in order for the organization to be perfect. So, when you organize a retreat for your friends, suppose you want to organize a retreat for business people. That is an opportunity for you to come together and learn the way to operate like a community of bees, a community of termites, a community of cells, a community of neurons, because in truth, reality functions like that, on the base of non self, on the base of interbeing.

In our century, the century which is ending, is characterized by individualism. We no longer believe in the family. The family structure has been shut down because we follow the cult of

the individual. We want only to do things that make us feel good, only to satisfy our private desire. We don't care about the family, we don't care about the church, we don't care about society, we follow just the order of the self.

They tell us that we have to go Vietnam and fight the Communists. They tell us that according to the domino theory if you cannot stop communism in Vietnam then communism will take over the world. But going to Vietnam and dying in the jungle in Vietnam is not something we feel good about. So we resist the war, we resist going to Vietnam. At Christmas time, instead of talking in terms of love, going home to our families and people and laughing like Santa Claus, ho, ho, ho. We say, we won't go; ho, ho, ho, we won't go, we won't go to Vietnam, because going to Vietnam and dying - that does not feel good. So the young people come together and resist. They have come together to resist not because they are compassionate, they care about the life of the Vietnamese, but because going to the jungle in Vietnam and dying there does not feel good. Therefore they rally people to resist the war and resist the war not for the sake of compassion but because the war doesn't belong to us. The war is yours, your generation wants this war, we the young people do not want this war because we don't feel good about this war.

So the peace movement was not based on a humanitarian idea, but just resisting the old generation and the ideas of the old generation. The peace movement was based on the cult of the self, that is why it was not a real peace movement. That is what happened during the sixties. If you have gone through that period, please sit down and look back. Resistance to the war was rather an egoistic act and not really a compassionate one. That is why there was so much anger, so much hatred in the peace movement. When I was there calling for stopping the bombing, many people said, "We don't want to stop the bombing, we want America to be defeated", because they were so angry. The defeat of America was their aim, but as a person who represented millions of people who died under the bombs I only wanted to see something very concrete, right away for people to stop the suffering right away, the cessation of the bombing, now, right away. And the peace movement said, no, we don't want a cessation of the bombing, we want only American withdrawal, we want only a defeat of America and they were not able to understand. Because stopping the bombing first and then arranging for other things would be more realistic.

I was working with people trying to stop the war in Vietnam, and I had a lot of contact with people in the peace movement. And the young people in the sixties, many of them operated on the base of self, not on the base of compassion, of understanding.

If it feels good, do it, that was the motto of the young generation. And also in context of the war they would say, make love, not war, remember? Because, make love, it feels good, make war, it doesn't feel good. And that is why our century, at least the second half of our century was characterized by the cult of the self: the small self, the atomized self. We only care about ourselves, care about the fame and the wealth and consumption by the self. Individualism has reached its highest point in the second half of the twentieth century. Now the young people have grown up, they got married, they have jobs and many have important positions in the Government. The scandals they produce which make us suffer also come from that tradition, that habit energy of serving the self.

Let us look deeply into the situation of Mr. Clinton and his family. Clinton was a youngster during the sixties, he also went to the streets manifesting against the war; intelligent, active. Unlike John F. Kennedy, he is operating on another base. John F. Kennedy was still very Catholic. What happened during the reign of Mr. Clinton? The scandal that went on, and on, and on, to the point that we had the desire to vomit, was the result of such a situation. Look on Mr. Clinton, look on the situation of his family, look at his spiritual background. We can discover a lot concerning the situation of the young generation that came out of the second half of the twentieth century.

Now people no longer believe in their church, in their spiritual tradition, people don't have a family that is solid, they don't believe in the family any more. When you don't believe in the family you cannot build a family. You don't have happiness in the family, you feel that happiness is possible only when you seek for fame and power and wealth. The happiness lies in the capacity of consuming. It is very clear and many people in the third world begin to imitate the West. In China, in Vietnam, in other countries, people have abandoned their spiritual tradition. They don't believe in Buddhism any more. They are looking for consumption. They want to buy the most sophisticated audio-video equipment, they want to consume portable telephones, faxes, color television and so on. And that is the meaning of their lives, to consume, to satisfy private desires. Private desires, in Vietnamese.

This is the situation we are in when the twentieth century is ending, the cult of the self. Individualism that has created a lot of suffering. Drugs, alcohol, aids, destruction of the family structure, no spiritual life, mental illness; all these characterize the second half of our century. We have a few weeks in order to do the work of self examination, the examination of our century.

We are to embark on a new century very soon, in two weeks. We should use our time to practice looking deeply. What our elders have done, how they have lived their lives and how we live our lives now, what we have done. Looking deeply. Every day give yourself one hour, two hours, doing sitting or walking, in order to look back at yourself and at our situation. We want to begin anew, we want a different kind of direction for the twenty first century, we don't want to continue this. Because this would be the continuation of our destruction and the destruction of other species. We want to take another direction.

We don't want to follow the direction of individualism, we don't want to continue in the direction of the cult of the self. We want to live in harmony, in the spirit of non self, in the spirit of interbeing. We don't want to follow the cult of self any more. The Sangha is our direction. Sangha building is the most noble task that we do, and Sangha would be the refuge for all of us in the next century. In order for the Sangha to be built we have to unblock ourselves, in order for information to come to us. Like the bees, they are capable of receiving information from other bees. Like the cells in our bodies, they are capable of knowing what to do and what not to do in order for harmony in the body to reign.

We want to behave like cells in our brain. They are in permanent communication with one another, they don't need a conductor, they don't need a director, they don't need a self. The insight is there and even science has testified to the value of the insight. What remains to do is to come together and try our best to live that insight. And the Buddha has offered so many ways to implement that insight into our daily life for us to suffer less, for us not to make the other person next to us suffer. And that is the very basic task of Sangha building.

The message I sent out on the 4th, called New Century Message, contains some of the things I have just shared with you. I would like each of you to have one copy to use as an instrument for the practice of looking deeply, looking back at ourselves, at our situation, at our century in order to know what direction we must take beginning with the twenty first century.

The Vietnamese version has been sent to Vietnam on the 4th of December. We don't have the text in French yet but Thay Doji will do it soon. I have four sets in English and I think I will give one for each hamlet. This is an instrument for us to practice deep looking and there will be a lot of friends coming for Christmas and for New Year. I think we have to offer each of them one copy. The moment when they arrive we should invite them to read the message and to reflect on it. Everyone should have one hour or two at least every day in order to do the work of looking deeply, and that is the practice of beginning anew. We have to look deeply in order to know what stop. What we should not do any more, what we should not continue any more, in order to open up a new area for us and for our children.

Looking deeply is our job, the only thing that is worthwhile to do while being in Plum Village is to practice looking deeply. On the 31st of December Thay will give a Dharma talk at five

o'clock in the afternoon, and the message will be something like the message in this Dharma talk, with more details and with an invitation for us to reflect upon.
Any of you has been a citizen of Woodstock nation? Any of you were in Woodstock?

Go as a Sangha

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on December 19, 1999 in Plum Village, France

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Today is December 19, 1999 and we are in the Upper Hamlet for our Dharma talk. I always think of the year 2000 as a bell of mindfulness, I have been using it as a bell of mindfulness to become aware that time passes very quickly. And we should be there in such a way that can make a future possible for our children and their children, because during the twentieth century we have made a mess and individualism has prevailed. The insight of interbeing, the insight of interconnectedness is so important for us. We have to learn that happiness cannot be possible as an individual matter. So seeking for happiness for your individual self is something impossible, and that is why we have to learn to live as Sangha. Not only humans have to live as a Sangha, but they have to learn to live with other species as a Sangha. We have to accept animals, vegetables and minerals as partners, as members of our Sangha and this way of life, this insight is very clear in the Buddhist teaching. So the most meaningful thing for us to do today, tomorrow and after tomorrow is to prepare ourselves to live as a Sangha.

It means we have to get out of the prison of our self and this is a practice. How to get out of the prison of self. We have been so long in that prison of self, we have suffered so much, we have caused a lot of suffering to other people and other species, and that is why to get out of that kind of prison is our practice.

For many years I have been saying that the next Buddha that will come to us will take the form of a Sangha and not an individual. That is not a fantasy on my part, but the insight I have got through my life, through my experience. The next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and everyone else will be a cell of the Buddhakaya, the Buddha body, and it is possible for us to prepare ourselves to be that cell in the body of the Buddha.

I always think of the twenty first century as a beautiful hill. It may be a great joy to climb the hill together as a Sangha and with the Sangha we can go very far. No matter how old you are, how young you are, you are climbing with the Sangha. The Buddhist sangha has been here two thousand five hundred years and they will continue. Let us be part of that Sangha. Let us use that Sangha in order to form a larger Sangha.

The 21st century may be a very pleasant century for us. You may enjoy deeply the coming century if you know how to embark upon it with faith, with joy, and with insight. I am convinced that with the insight of interbeing, with the capacity of living as a Sangha, the climb will be very beautiful, very pleasant.

You are now at the foot of the hill and in just eleven days we will begin the climb. And we shall be climbing the hill of the century with our ancestors who are in us and with our children: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors, blood children and spiritual children, hand in hand we will climb the century hill with joy. The only thing to remember is to do it as a Sangha, not as individuals any more. Climbing like that we need some freedom, some liberation: freedom of the self, liberation of the self, and the joy will be collective joy, it will be nourishing us.

Looking into the individual you see the collective and looking into the collective you see the individual and we know that with that insight we will be free. Happiness will not be possible without the happiness of those around us, including animals, vegetables and minerals. On the last day of the year, on the last day of the century we will be celebrating our togetherness according to a schedule offered to us by the brothers of the Upper Hamlet. We will have in the morning two hours of solitary meditation. In the morning we will gather and receive instructions as to how to practice two hours of solitary meditation.

Each of us can go somewhere and really work on it. With our suffering, our despair we can open up a new door for the future. We are determined to begin anew and we make a commitment with ourselves and with our ancestors and our children that we will do it differently next year, next century. We will not allow individualism to prevail and to destroy. We will learn how to see the happiness of the Sangha as our own happiness and we will learn how to live as a cell in a body, as a bee in a beehive. Responsible, open, because when we are open we receive the information from other members of the Sangha, and we know what to do and what not to do in order for the Sangha to be happy.

The Sangha's will is the Buddha's will. The Sangha's will is God's will, and that is why we have to be open and to receive information. Sometime they don't use words but the way they think, the way they feel, the way they look, the way they act is very clear, and gives very clear messages. So, if we just keep open and then we receive the information. And we know perfectly what to do and what not to do in order to be a good member of the Sangha.

You know that the bees communicate, they communicate with their dance. The termites also, they use chemicals in order to communicate. Our thoughts, our words and our acts are made of energy that is a kind of chemicals. The way we are in a community is the way we communicate and if you are mindful enough, if you are open enough you receive the communication from the other members of the Sangha.

We know that in our brain the neurons they always fire their electrical impulses in order to keep the communication alive and continuous between themselves, they don't need a boss to tell them what to do. The neurons are capable of being there, open and in permanent communication. That is why they respond to other neurons, they collaborate with other neurons in such a wonderful way! We should learn from them.

When we play music we notice that the music and the rhythm create a kind of reaction in our brain. We know that oscillation patterns take place in various areas of the brain and there is a symphony taking place, a kind of orchestra coming together musically, without any director. If you remember the text, you see that the first moment of consciousness takes place in a fraction of a second ksana (Sanskrit) is the shortest unit of time. It is a moment of consciousness and that moment of consciousness is not the product of one neuron, it is a product of all the neurons together. It is like the flame, one ksana (Sanskrit), and if the second moment of consciousness takes place, it is thanks to the presence of the moment of consciousness that has just died. And the two moments of consciousness succeeding each other have a base, because without that base it cannot happen.

Look at the candle. We see the flame, we see the wax, we see the conditions like the oxygen and the flame cannot be there without a base. Because the base is always there that is why the flame can continue. Looking deeply into the flame you can see the base. The base is alaya vijnana, the root consciousness. But the root consciousness, alaya vijnana is not something that is apart from a moment of consciousness because looking deeply into the moment of consciousness which lasts only a fraction of a second we can see alaya vijnana, we can see the base. It is like looking at the flame we can see everything else, like the wax and so on.

Living in the community we are aware that every one of us has a base, the notion of base in Buddhism is very important. Ashraya (Sanskrit) means the base. Touching ourselves deeply, looking deeply into ourselves we can touch the base. And being able to touch our base we are able to realize the nature of interconnectedness within us and (with) the rest. It means our brothers and sisters, our brother tree, our sister rock, all our brothers and sisters. Looking into a rock we see the base, looking into a tree we see the base, looking into our brother we see the base. It is like looking into every Dharma we can see alaya vijnana, it is the same. And with that insight in us there is no longer any separation if we know how to respond and to react in a way that harmony will be possible in the Sangha, and in the larger Sangha because our Sangha has humans, animals, minerals and vegetables.

So the insight of no self, the insight of interbeing, the insight of interconnectedness if we can keep them alive, if we know how to cultivate that insight and keep it alive daily we will be free from the prison of self. We will be able to see the happiness of the Sangha as our own, this is very important. And that is why in two hours of solitary meditation we should do our best in order to work it out, to make that determination not to continue the ancient way of life. We have to make a solemn promise to us and to our base and to everyone that we will be different, we will learn to live as a Sangha. The family is a Sangha. The society is a Sangha. The Earth is a Sangha.

Two hours of solitary retreat on the 31st is a gift, whether you are here or you are in another place you are welcome to take at least two hours for your meditation. Look back at yourself, look back at the world and see how much suffering we have created. And we see the roots of the suffering, of isolation, of sorrow, of fear. We see our wrong perceptions, we know that in the past we were victims of our wrong perceptions. We believed so much in our perceptions. And practicing looking deeply we see how wrong we were in our perceptions. And we promise that we will not do like that again, we rely on the Sangha to have a better perception of reality because the Sangha eyes are always brighter, clearer than the eyes of an individual. This is exactly what we say when we declare, I take refuge in the Sangha. I take refuge in the Sangha, means I don't rely on my perceptions alone. I don't want to rely on my individual perceptions alone. I want to be ready to see, to look at things with the Sangha eyes. Using the Sangha eyes is a wonderful practice and that is our practice.

So during the two solitary hours we should take up that kind of resolution. We will promise that we will see with the Sangha eyes, look with the Sangha eyes, and feel with the Sangha heart. That will bring a lot of happiness and harmony into the Sangha, the small Sangha and the larger Sangha. In fact, the five skandhas, the five elements within us are also a Sangha. They find themselves in conflict very often.

So, the two hours of solitary retreat in Plum Village on the 31st is a gift. We will receive some instructions in how to do it and then we will spend two hours alone. Whether we go to the garden, we sit in the meditation hall, work it out and make a promise to yourself. You may like to have it written down in a piece of paper, a promise to yourself, a promise to your ancestors, a promise to your teacher, your promise to your brothers and sisters, your children. That is the most meaningful thing to do on the last day of the century, the last day of the year. When the new century comes, when the New Year comes we will have finished our walking meditation and we'll come to this hall and we offer our prayer and our promises to our ancestors and our children. We have a special prayer for the new century, the New Year. In English, in German, in French and in Vietnamese and each of us will have a copy of that prayer, of that promise but you have your own promise you will make as an outcome of your two hours of solitary retreat. You may like to bring it along and after the collective prayers and promises you may like to read it for yourself, to your ancestors and to your children. The promise is made to our ancestors, to our brothers and sisters and also to our children, whether they are blood children or spiritual children, we have to make that promise. That promise will be made after those two hours of solitary meditation.

At some time we have lunch, a simple lunch, because the two hours of solitary retreat may happen during that time also, before lunch, after lunch, at least two hours. And then in the afternoon you may like to continue until the bell calls you for collective mindful work to prepare for the ceremony. At five o'clock in the afternoon will be the last Dharma talk of the year, last Dharma talk of the last century of the 21st century. And that Dharma talk will be relayed simultaneously to Germany and North America. We have the Dharma talk right here and our brothers and sisters in Germany and in America will have it through the telephone.

The Dharma talk will begin at 5pm and end at about 6:30pm and after that we may prepare ourselves for the practice of Touching the Earth. Touching the Earth is a further practice in order to connect with our ancestors, to connect with the land, to connect with other species

and to connect with our children and their children, because our children and their children are already there in us. We have to be responsible to our children and their children. After the Dharma talk we'll take some time before we have dinner, and then instead of Dharma discussion we will do a Touching the Earth. Because I think Touching the Earth will be a deeper practice, Touching the Earth is to connect with our ancestors, with our brothers and sisters in the blood family, in the spiritual family, and also to connect with our children and their children who are already there within us. Touching the Earth we should finish before 10:30pm because at 11pm sharp there will be a bell to gather around the linden tree to receive instructions as to how to do the walking meditation, because we will be climbing the new century together as a Sangha. This is a very special walking meditation. You really want to walk as a Sangha and not as individuals any more.

Have you seen a centipede? A little creature that has lots of... Yeah! we walk like that! Thousands of feet! There will be a lot of us on that day! To walk in such a way that you can go as a Sangha. If it does not rain the walk will be very pleasant, if it rains we will walk anyway, we have to be equipped with an umbrella. On our path there will be kerosene lamps so that we can walk with ease. It must be a very deep kind of walking, walking as a Sangha. We have to walk in such a way that individuals will dissolve, for the Sangha to walk.

What is the English word for a centipede? Centipede? And we begin to walk at 11:30 or so, or earlier. We'll start from the linden tree and we really begin. The new century has not come yet at that time but we have half an hour in order to reach the other end of the road. When the New Year comes there will be bells, a little bit from everywhere, also from this meditation hall and you will know that the new century has arrived. We'll pause for one minute, to breathe, to be aware that the new century, the new millennium has arrived. Smile to it, and we begin to climb the new century together, with peace, with joy, as a Sangha. This is a very deep practice and joyful practice also. When you come up to the hill there will be a chariot with candles or lamps, and our children will come together and push the chariot which has the number 2000 on it. We will go directly from there to the meditation hall and our path will be lit with kerosene lamps, the brothers don't trust the electricity very much so they want to equip the path with kerosene lamps, hundreds of them.

So, the walk should be very joyful, silent, but powerful and joyful with the children leading. And when we come to the meditation hall we will arrive before the altar of our ancestors, blood and spiritual ancestors, we will light some incense and offer our prayers. Our prayer is to be connected with our ancestors, Sangha, children, and grandchildren. We should select members of the Sangha who can read the promises/prayers out loud in several languages. And each of us will receive a copy of that promise because we vow to live in such a way that the Sangha's happiness becomes our happiness. That is the only way to dissolve suffering and loneliness and to build a happy life for us and for our children in the next century.

After offering incense and flowers and fresh water to our ancestors and to the earth and to our children, then we practice touching the earth four times and it will be time for hugging meditation. And you may have your promise written on a piece of paper and you may like to come forth to the altar and you read it silently. You don't need to go to the altar in order to read it, you can do it anywhere, in the open air and you just read it to the sky and earth, and the ancestors will hear it. Your brothers and sisters and your children will hear it, and that is how we will live the moments of transition between the old year and the New Year.

Bell

At the beginning of this winter retreat I offered the Sangha a kind of homework, remember? And that is very much in line with these instructions, because the homework is the practice of looking deeply in order to see how we acted and reacted when a difficult situation came. The practice, the homework is to see clearly all these elements of that period in order for us to see another way, a better way, of acting and reacting so suffering will not be created for ourselves and for the people around us.

It is very important because if you have suffered during that period you have an opportunity to learn from that period of suffering, you make the vow not to be caught in these kind of perceptions any more. You make a vow to be more open in order to understand better and to respond better, with non violence, with love, with understanding. Then it is us who has the power to transform a situation. We are no longer victims of the situation.

We have the habit of thinking that our happiness depends so much on the situation around us. We have the habit of thinking that our happiness depends on the other person. We don't know that conditions for our happiness are plenty, more than enough for us to be happy. However, we get caught, we are not able of recognizing these elements of happiness, they are there already and we deprive ourselves of that happiness and also we deprive the loved ones of their happiness because we are not capable of being happy.

The capacity to be happy should be the object of our practice and we know the Buddha always repeated it. The present moment presents so many wonders of life, and there are so many positive ingredients, so many positive conditions for our happiness. But because we get caught in one idea we cannot make use of these conditions and to be happy in the here and the now. We always blame the situation, we always blame the other person or persons, so the practice is to liberate ourselves from that kind of habit knowing that happiness depends on us, not on the situation or on the other person.

The other person will have to practice very much in the same way. If we can change the way of looking we will dissolve unhappiness and then happiness will just come naturally. We don't have to change the situation, we don't have to change the other person. We accept the situation as it is, we accept the other person as he/she is, and suddenly we become very happy because we are free. We are not caught in our idea of happiness.

In each hamlet there is a wall gazette with the title Climbing the New Century together. I don't know if the brothers and the sisters have created enough space, it should be very large.

And here, 'Climbing Together The Hill', Thay has written in calligraphy these words in English, in French, and in Vietnamese. So, you are welcome to contribute an article for this gazette, you just come and stick that article on the board. Each person will have a space like this, enough for one sheet of paper. If your article is more than one page, you put the first page on the top and after having read the first page they will read the second page. And you may like to use the computer for your article, you may like to use handwriting. You make like to write a poem, a short story, you may draw something. But everything we do for that magazine, for that gazette is in order to think of climbing together the hill of the 21st century. Climbing the hill as a Sangha and not as individuals anymore.

And you may like to write in German, in English, in French, in Vietnamese and so on. We have ten days to enjoy doing that. You are too busy to do it? Shame! You are too busy? So we wish you all a very joyful Christmas and New Year, there will be a lot of people coming, especially for the New Year, and we should help them. How to help them? By practicing deeply. Practicing deeply because you have had the opportunity to receive the instructions during many weeks. We do it deeply and when they come you share with them the way to practice. It is very important. The Dharma teachers, the apprentice Dharma teachers, everyone has to help so that we will have a wonderful celebration of the New Year, of the New Century together. So it depends on how you help our friends when they come to understand the meaning of the practice.

[Bell]

Post Scriptum

Dear Friends,





These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the interbeing nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

This project operates from '**Dana**', generosity, so these talks are available for everyone. You may forward and redistribute them via email, and you may also print them and distribute them to members of your Sangha. The purpose of this is to make Thay's teachings available to as many people who would like to receive them as possible. The only thing we ask is that you please circulate them as they are, please do not distribute or reproduce them in altered form or edit them in any way.

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1	Welcome to the dharmataalks-html E-Mail Group	Plum Village	Mon 5/10/1999
5	Plum Village Transcription Project	Transcription Project	Thu 5/13/1999
7	1996 July 16, Returning to Our True Home 	UH-Office	Wed 12/15/1999
8	1996 July 21 Practices for the Twenty-first Cent 	Transcription Project	Sun 12/19/1999
9	Plum Village Dharma Talks format.	Transcription Project	Sun 12/19/1999
10	New Year Message from Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh 	Transcripts	Sat 1/8/2000
11	1996 July 23 Be Like the Earth 	Transcripts	Sat 1/8/2000
12	1996 July 28 Transcending Injustice 	Transcripts	Sun 1/16/2000
13	1996 July 30 The Art of Healing Ourselves 	Transcripts	Wed 2/2/2000
14	1996 Aug 4 The Five-Fold Steps of Training 	Transcripts	Fri 3/3/2000
15	1996 Aug 6 Mara and the Buddha - Embracing our S 	Transcripts	Sun 3/19/2000
16	1996 Aug 11 Meditations for the Sick and Dying 	Transcripts	Mon 4/3/2000
17	1996 Aug 13 1996 Suffering Can Teach Us 	Transcripts	Mon 4/17/2000
18	1997 Aug 11 - All in one, One in All. 	Transcripts	Tue 5/9/2000
19	1997 Aug 13 Going to the Shore of Non-Suffering 	Transcripts	Tue 5/30/2000
20	1997 July 16 Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energi 	Transcripts	Wed 6/28/2000
21	July 21 1997 We are the Continuation of our Ances 	Transcripts	Sun 7/23/2000
22	July 23 1997 Watering Our Good Seeds 	Transcripts	Sat 8/5/2000
23	July 28 1997 Overcoming the Fear of Death 	Transcripts	Mon 8/14/2000
24	July 30 1997 Healing is Possible through Resting 	Transcripts	Fri 9/1/2000
25	1999 Nov 25 Recognizing Feelings 	Transcripts	Wed 1/17/2001
26	E-dharma talks of Thich Nhat Hanh! 	Transcripts	Wed 1/17/2001
27	1999 12 02 Mindfulness of the Body in the Body 	Transcripts	Mon 2/5/2001

2 8	1999 Dec 05 The means are the end 	Transcripts	Tue 2/27/2001
2 9	1999 Dec 09 Questions & Answers 	Transcripts	Fri 3/16/2001
3 0	1999 Dec 16 Living in the Spirit of Non-self 	Transcripts	Thu 6/7/2001
3 1	1999 Dec 19 Go as a Sangha 	Transcripts	Fri 6/15/2001